



IBM Impact Accelerator Education and Workforce Development Cohort

RFP readiness toolkit

The IBM Impact Accelerator invites proposals for AI-driven solutions that advance education and workforce development outcomes. The most competitive proposals clearly demonstrate the problem, solution, readiness, and potential for large-scale impact.

This toolkit contains practical tips on how to strengthen your application, a sample participation timeline outlining what to expect if selected, and common pitfalls to avoid.



Top tips for a strong proposal

1. Fully answer every question in the RFP application

Be complete and specific in describing your challenge, stakeholders, beneficiaries, goals, data sources, and implementation plan. Ensure that you demonstrate a clear path to impact. Avoid “check-the-box” responses. IBM evaluators will look for clarity, relevance, and specificity.

2. Align your solution to IBM capabilities

Clearly articulate why specific technologies (AI, quantum, cloud, open-source tools) and related expertise are essential to your solution. Demonstrate understanding of how AI will scale impact, strengthen systems, or generate high-quality datasets.

3. Show implementation readiness

Describe realistic timelines, milestones, key activities, and any partners involved. Include risks and mitigation strategies for technology, data access, or operations.

4. Demonstrate community & stakeholder engagement

Explain how educators, learners of all ages, parents, employers, partner institutions, or other stakeholders will be involved in design, piloting, and the long-term success of the project. Also explain how solution reflects community needs and inclusive access to education or workforce pathways.

5. Highlight clear, measurable impact

Connect your activities to KPIs, expected outcomes, and number of people who will directly benefit within two years.

6. Tailor the proposal to your organization’s strengths

Use evidence from past work, relevant data, and examples that show your expertise in education or workforce development.

Participation timeline

What to expect if selected

The IBM Impact Accelerator is a two-year program where IBM collaborates with organizations to design, develop, and deploy a technical solution directly benefiting communities.

	Phase I - Ideation (~ 6 months)	Phase II - Development and implementation (~ 18 months)
IBM Garage*	We start here to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Identify and prioritize needs– Create an impact roadmap to address needs– Design and deliver a solution demonstration system	
Technical services*	Technical services to <i>build</i> a minimum viable product (MVP) or, if a solution already exists, enhance it*	Technical services to help <i>implement</i> MVP or enhanced solution
Access to IBM technologies	Access and credits for IBM Watson, IBM Cloud, and other leading technologies	Access to technologies continues throughout development and implementation
Access to IBM expertise	Technical mentorship to inform solution implementation	Technical mentorship to support digital transformation
Access to digital learning	Access to free skills from IBM SkillsBuild on topics such as AI, cloud, cybersecurity, data analytics, and more	
Community events and forums	Access to community events and forums with IBM Impact Accelerator participant organizations for insight and opportunity exchanges	

*Collaboration opportunities where IBM clients, business partners, and other like-minded orgs are invited to contribute their own expertise, solutions, and other resources to help advance shared social impact goals.

Common mistakes to avoid

1. Weak implementation plan

Limited programmatic plans to use IBM-supported solutions in interventions directly benefiting people at scale represents a lack of readiness. Undefined timelines, lack of consideration of dependencies, or unclear activities raise doubts about feasibility.

2. Submitting generic or boilerplate responses

Copy-and-paste text weakens your proposal and fails to address IBM's specific focus areas.

3. Overly technical or vague descriptions

Avoid jargon without explanation and do not provide vague claims without details; evaluators must understand your solution, data model, and expected outcomes.

4. Failing to demonstrate organizational fit

Not explaining who you serve, the scale of your programs, or how your mission connects to your proposal weakens your case.

5. Insufficient data strategy

Not identifying data owners, access challenges, or data-quality risks signals limited readiness for AI-based work.

A compelling proposal is clear, complete, evidence-based, and tailored to IBM's mission, demonstrating not only what you will build, but why it matters, who it reaches, and how it will endure beyond the two-year collaboration.

Submit your proposal →

For further guidance, check the [FAQ section](#) of the cohort landing page.

© Copyright IBM Corporation 2026

Produced in the
United States of America
January 2026

IBM, the IBM logo, IBM Trademarks List, are trademarks or registered trademarks of International Business Machines Corporation, in the United States and/or other countries. Other product and service names might be trademarks of IBM or other companies. A current list of IBM trademarks is available on ibm.com/trademark.

This document is current as of the initial date of publication and may be changed by IBM at any time. Not all offerings are available in every country in which IBM operates.

THE INFORMATION IN THIS DOCUMENT IS PROVIDED "AS IS" WITHOUT ANY WARRANTY, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING WITHOUT ANY WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY, FITNESS FOR A PARTICULAR PURPOSE AND ANY WARRANTY OR CONDITION OF NON-INFRINGEMENT.

IBM products are warranted according to the terms and conditions of the agreements under which they are provided.

