The National Science Foundation has launched the National Innovation Network (NIN), comprising university Sites, regional Nodes, and experienced mentors to support and nurture innovation and entrepreneurship in academic settings. The goal is to support interested students and faculty in bridging the gap between the lab and marketplace, with a focus on executing evidence-based entrepreneurship, actively engaging in customer discovery, and finding Product-Market fit.

The USC NSF ­I-Corps Site, awarded in 2014, is proud to be part of the NIN and specifically supports teams of USC students and faculty in beginning this process. In particular, USC teams are awarded $2,000-$2,500 NSF I-Corps Mini Grants to support prototyping and the customer discovery process. Supported by Innovation Node – Los Angeles, the regional Node housed at USC, the USC I-Corps Site provides innovation workshops and software support to teach teams how to interview prospective customers and find the best initial Product-Market fit for their innovation. The PI of the USC I-Corps Site is Dr. Peter A. Beerel, a USC Viterbi faculty member with entrepreneurial experience and the Co-PI is Jennifer Dyer, Executive Director of the [USC Stevens Center for Innovation](http://stevens.usc.edu).

Specifically, the USC I-Corps Site currently supports two existing USC programs – the [Maseeh Entrepreneurship Competition](http://maseeh.usc.edu) and the [USC I-Diploma](http://idiploma.usc.edu/). MEPC is an annual business competition housed in the Viterbi School of Engineering and requires a Viterbi student to be part of the team. It is supported by the [Greif Center for Entrepreneurial Studies](http://www.marshall.usc.edu/faculty/centers/grief) at USC and is coupled with a strong mentorship program. The USC I-Diploma Program is run out of the USC Provost’s Office and targets teams led by doctoral students and postdoctoral fellows across all STEM disciplines. Doctoral students completing this program get a USC Diploma in Innovation along with their PhD. Supported through the USC I-Corps Site, teams in both programs receive NSF I-Corps Mini Grants, take part in innovation workshops that focus on evidence-based entrepreneurship, and are given access to innovation management software that helps guide them through the process.

Teams that successfully complete the NSF I-Corps Site-supported programs are encouraged to apply for national NSF I-Corps Grants.