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Graduate student entrepreneurs earn development support through Innovation Catalyst Grants

Two exciting projects have received support from a provincial grant program that provides a two-year runway for entrepreneurs to develop and commercialize innovative, science-based products and services.

Greg McGillis and Mojtaba Nazariahangarkolae (MSc '18) have earned [Innovation Catalyst Grants](#) (ICG) worth \$250,000 for work they are doing at the University of Lethbridge, supported by Agility, the University's comprehensive idea and incubation shop that fosters bold ideas and helps students put them into action.



“The whole focus of the grant is to help bring research to market, and to help stimulate the economy and create jobs,” says Dr. Luc Roberts (BSc '12, PhD '23), entrepreneurial strategist for the Teaching Centre and [Agility](#). “This grant, in particular, is quite helpful because it offers both a stipend for the person doing the work as well as seed money for business expenses.”

Roberts knows well the benefits of the program as he was a recipient of similar funding when the ICG was known as GreenSTEM and supported the launch of Allos Bioscience, a start-up he initiated with fellow ULeithbridge alumnus Harland Brandon (BSc '13, PhD '21). While GreenSTEM was focused on green energy and emissions reduction, the ICG is much broader and simply encourages innovation with a hardware component.

“If you have a solid business idea, this program gives you the opportunity to take a good run at it, because for two years you can go after it full time,” adds Roberts. “You’re being paid, the bills are being paid and you can devote all your time to your idea.”

McGillis and Nazariahangarkolae join ICG recipients who received funding this cycle from the University of Alberta and University of Calgary. The program selects projects

annually from each of the province's three comprehensive universities. Brent Puchalski (Paramoria Agri-Science) and Tyler Bennett (Coagtech Ltd.) were funded at Ulethbridge last year.

"Each year is a new cohort and you're all part of a pan-Alberta cohort of applicants from the other universities," says Roberts, noting eligible applicants are recent graduates of a master's or PhD program. "Because you are recent grads, most don't have a lot of business experience, so to have access to all these business resources the program provides is huge."

McGillis, whose [Brain Care Technologies](#) start-up recently finished second in Agility's Launch Point Pitch Competition, is looking to revolutionize the process of detecting dementia in people and paving the way for earlier interventions to enhance quality of life and even delay the onset of the condition.

"The ICG significantly supports the achievement of our mission — empowering individuals to improve their cognitive health through early detection and monitoring of dementia so they can age well," says McGillis, who is developing a headgear device patients would wear for testing brain activity. "This award expedites the hiring of additional staff, expansion of our collaboration with stakeholders and partners, and advancement of the development of our intellectual property to enable us to fulfill our commercialization objectives."

Nazariahangarkolae's [Synaptag Technology Inc.](#) is focused on improving RFID (radio frequency identification) solutions for animal tracking that can be used both in a lab setting with small animals such as mice and rats, or on a large scale in agricultural applications.

Nazariahangarkolae says ICG funding will enable his group to expand its team with highly skilled talent and invest in essential hardware and equipment to fully realize the potential of their technology.

"The ICG program has additionally facilitated our access to two technical and business mentors, whose distinct perspectives and expertise will greatly support us throughout our entrepreneurial journey," he adds. "Moreover, ICG offers quarterly and annual networking events which are an ideal opportunity for us to gain valuable connections, access resources and knowledge, validate our ideas and build our brand."

The next deadline for applications to the ICG program is Sept. 15, 2024, and more information can be found on the [Agility web page](#).

To view online: <https://www.ulethbridge.ca/unews/article/graduate-student-entrepreneurs-earn-development-support-through-innovation-catalyst-grants>

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