

WORK CENTRAL AB

Innovation & Startups

Building Something New From Central Alberta

A Career Resource from Work Central AB

Innovation & Startups in Central Alberta

Central Alberta's innovation ecosystem is smaller than Calgary or Edmonton's, but it offers focused, accessible support for technology and knowledge-based entrepreneurs. This guide covers the resources available to founders building something new in the region.

1. Central Alberta Regional Innovation Network (CARIN)

CARIN exists specifically to drive growth of the innovation ecosystem in Central Alberta, providing dedicated support to technology and knowledge-based companies. It's a natural first stop for founders building tech-driven or innovation-focused ventures in the region.

2. Alberta Innovates

Alberta Innovates is the province's major innovation agency, working to diversify Alberta's economy and support research and innovation across sectors. It offers funding streams, connections, and programs relevant to technology, agri-tech, and other innovation-driven businesses, complementing the more regionally focused support from CARIN.

3. Post-Secondary Innovation Connections

- Red Deer Polytechnic's applied research programs connect faculty, students, and local businesses to collaborate on real-world innovation projects.
- Olds College's agri-tech focus creates natural opportunities for innovation connected to agricultural technology, a genuine regional strength.
- Both institutions can be valuable partners for startups needing applied research support, testing facilities, or student talent.

4. Funding for Startups

Where Startups Can Look for Capital

- Community Futures Central Alberta for early-stage loans and business coaching.
- Alberta Innovates for research and innovation-focused grants and programs.
- BDC for growth-stage financing as the business scales.
- Angel investor networks and broader Alberta startup investment communities, typically accessed through Calgary or Edmonton-based networks given the region's smaller local investor pool.

5. Building a Startup From Central Alberta

Building a startup outside a major tech hub has real advantages - lower overhead costs, a tighter, more accessible local business community, and strong support organizations relative to the region's size. Many Central Alberta founders combine local resources like CARIN and Community Futures with occasional travel to Calgary's or Edmonton's larger investor and startup networks for capital and connections beyond what the region offers directly.

6. Frequently Asked Questions

Common Questions

Is Central Alberta a good place to start a tech startup? It offers lower overhead and a tighter-knit support community than Calgary or Edmonton, though founders should expect to travel to those cities for some investor and networking access.

Does CARIN only support tech companies? Its primary focus is technology and knowledge-based businesses, though it's worth reaching out directly to confirm fit for your specific venture.

Can agriculture-focused startups access innovation support here? Yes - Olds College's agri-tech specialization makes Central Alberta a genuinely strong location for agricultural innovation specifically.

6. Building Your Founder Network Locally

- Connect with other regional founders through CARIN events and post-secondary innovation programming, since peer relationships often provide the most practical, day-to-day advice.
- Consider mentorship relationships with more established Central Alberta business owners, many of whom are accessible through Community Futures or the Chamber network.
- Stay engaged with both the local ecosystem and the larger Calgary/Edmonton startup communities to balance grounded local support with broader industry connections.

Innovation & Startups Checklist

- ✓ Connected with CARIN if building a technology or knowledge-based business
- ✓ Explored Alberta Innovates funding and programs
- ✓ Considered post-secondary partnerships through Red Deer Polytechnic or Olds College
- ✓ Identified funding sources appropriate to your startup's current stage
- ✓ Explored broader Alberta startup networks in Calgary or Edmonton if needed

Build Your Business With Work Central AB

See our Funding & Grants and Business Support Organizations guides for more on financing your startup. Visit [**workcentralab.ca/resources**](https://workcentralab.ca/resources).