

Top 15 Biotech Incubators and Accelerators in the US (2026)

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Executive Summary

The United States hosts a dense, layered ecosystem of biotech incubators and accelerators, ranging from equity-free corporate networks to venture-fund-backed cohort programs. **Johnson & Johnson Innovation's JLABS** network reports more than **1,240 member companies and residents globally** and over **\$173 billion in secured and contingent funding raised** by those companies, all without taking equity (Source: jllabs.jnjinnovation.com). At the other end of the spectrum, equity-taking pre-seed accelerators such as **IndieBio** (now folded into **SOSV NY** and **SOSV SF** as of early 2026) have produced **310 graduate companies that have collectively raised \$3.6 billion** on an initial check of roughly **\$550,000** per startup (Source: indiebio.co) (Source: web.archive.org).

Between corporate networks and venture accelerators sit wet-lab real estate operators: **LabCentral** in Cambridge, Massachusetts operates over **210,000 square feet** supporting up to **125 startups**, whose resident and alumni companies have raised **\$21.85 billion cumulatively since 2013**, including **\$1.25 billion in 2025 alone** (Source: labcentral.org) (Source: labcentral.org). **Cambridge Innovation Center (CIC)** has grown to over **1.5 million square feet** globally with clients that have raised **\$17 billion**, and **Alexandria LaunchLabs** operates turnkey lab platforms in six US metro areas (Source: cic.com) (Source: alexandrialaunchlabs.com).

University-affiliated programs add another model. **Stanford's StartX** takes **no equity and charges no fees**, while **UC Berkeley's SkyDeck** invests **\$210,000 for 7.5% equity** and MIT's **The Engine**, now a 501(c)(3) nonprofit as of 2025, provides **220,000 square feet** of managed lab and engineering space without taking any equity stake in its resident companies (Source: startx.com) (Source: skydeck.berkeley.edu) (Source: engine.xyz). For AI-driven drug discovery specifically, generalist accelerators have become major players: **Y Combinator** invests **\$500,000 for 7%** and lists **600 healthcare startups** in its portfolio, while **a16z's speedrun** program invests up to **\$1 million** and has deployed over **\$200 million across 250-plus startups** since 2023 (Source: ycombinator.com) (Source: speedrun.a16z.com).

The macro backdrop shapes how founders should read this landscape: US life-sciences venture deal value reached **\$36.3 billion across 1,827 deals in 2025**, still well below the 2021 peak of **\$55.1 billion**, according to the PitchBook-NVCA Venture Monitor (Source: nvca.org). Non-dilutive alternatives remain substantial: the National Institutes of Health has issued over **37,060 cumulative SBIR/STTR awards**, more than any other federal grantor, and Phase I awards can now reach **\$323,090** without special approval (Source: sbir.gov) (Source: sbir.gov). This report profiles 15 selected US biotech incubators and accelerators as of August 2026, explains how incubator and accelerator models differ, and outlines the funding terms and application steps founders should evaluate.

Introduction and Background

Biotechnology startups face a structurally different path to market than software companies: a therapeutics or diagnostics venture typically needs wet-lab benches, biosafety-rated equipment, and a multi-year runway before generating its first dollar of revenue, which is why a distinct category of incubators and accelerators has grown up around the sector. The Congressional Research Service (CRS) distinguishes the two models plainly: incubators are "designed to support entrepreneurs in the very early stages" of company formation over open-ended periods, while accelerators are "usually cohort-based programs" that "run for a fixed term" and typically "provide a small stipend or seed investment in exchange for some equity" (Source: congress.gov) (Source: congress.gov).

That distinction has scaled quickly. By 2023 the United States had at least **150 business accelerators**, and worldwide accelerator-linked startup investment grew roughly tenfold in four years, from under \$5 billion in 2014 to \$50 billion in 2018, per data cited in the same CRS brief (Source: congress.gov) (Source: congress.gov). The International Business Innovation Association (InBIA), the trade body that has tracked the sector since founding as the National Business Incubation Association in 1985, finds in its most recent Impact Index survey of 97 entrepreneur support organizations that incubation remains the more common program format nationally (65% of respondents) versus accelerator cohorts (36%), with biotech consistently named among the top focus sectors (Source: inbia.org) (Source: inbia.org).

This report profiles 15 selected US biotech incubators and accelerators as of August 2026, organized into four operating models: equity-free corporate and nonprofit networks, wet-lab real estate incubators, university-affiliated programs, and equity-taking venture accelerators. The "**Top 15**" label is a non-ordinal editorial selection: programs were included based on an active US presence, relevance to biotech or life-sciences founders, and publicly available information about their model or terms. Programs are grouped by model rather than ranked against one another, because lab-space memberships, nonprofit support, and equity investments are not directly comparable. The report also explains, in plain terms, how incubators differ from accelerators, what funding and equity terms founders should evaluate, and how application processes can vary. Consultancies advising pharmaceutical and life-sciences technology buyers, including intuitionlabs.ai, track this incubator landscape closely because portfolio companies graduating from these programs become the next wave of enterprise software, compliance, and commercial-analytics customers as they scale from bench science to regulated commercial operations (Source: intuitionlabs.ai).

The 15 US Biotech Incubators and Accelerators at a Glance

Table 1 below summarizes the 15 selected programs profiled in this report, spanning four operating models and geographies from Boston to the San Francisco Bay Area. Programs are grouped by model rather than a single composite score, since an equity-free lab-space membership and an equity investment are not directly comparable.

Table 1: Comparison of Selected US Biotech Incubators and Accelerators (2026)

PROGRAM	MODEL	FUNDING / EQUITY	PRIMARY US LOCATIONS	FOCUS
JLABS (J&J Innovation)	Corporate no-equity incubator network	No equity; infrastructure, mentorship, deal access (Source: jlabs.jnjinnovation.com)	Boston/Cambridge, San Diego, San Francisco, plus virtual (Source: jlabs.jnjinnovation.com)	Therapeutics, medtech, diagnostics, consumer health
BioLabs	Membership lab-space network	No equity; per-bench membership fees (Source: biolabs.io)	Multiple US biotech clusters	General life sciences
MassChallenge (Health Tech / Life Sciences Traction)	Nonprofit no-equity accelerator	No cost, no equity (Source: masschallenge.org)	Boston	Healthcare and life sciences
LabCentral	Wet-lab real estate incubator	Fee-based, no equity; pricing varies by space (Source: labcentral.org)	Cambridge, Boston	Early-stage biotech, up to \$10M raised
Alexandria LaunchLabs	Turnkey lab real estate platform	Fee-based lease; capital access via Alexandria Venture Investments (Source: alexandrialaunchlabs.com)	Cambridge, NYC, RTP, SF Bay Area, Seattle, San Diego	Life sciences, biotech
Cambridge Innovation Center (CIC)	Coworking and wet-lab real estate	Fee-based; Boston office from \$1,585/month (Source: cic.com)	Cambridge/Boston, Philadelphia, St. Louis	General innovation, dedicated lab space
IndieBio (SOSV NY/SF)	Equity-taking pre-seed accelerator	~\$550K initial investment (Source: web.archive.org)	New York, San Francisco	Synthetic biology, biotech platforms
Illumina Ventures Labs (formerly Illumina Accelerator)	Equity-taking accelerator	Up to \$200K convertible note for 7% equity (Source: illumina.com)	San Francisco Bay Area	Genomics applications
Petri Bio	Pre-seed venture creation program	At least \$250K seed funding reported (Source: fiercebiotech.com)	Boston	Biology-engineering frontier
StartX (Stanford)	University-affiliated, equity-free	No equity, no fees (Source: startx.com)	Stanford, CA	Stanford-affiliated founders, all sectors incl. biotech
UC Berkeley SkyDeck / Bakar Labs	University accelerator fund + lab incubator	SkyDeck: \$210K for 7.5% (Source: skydeck.berkeley.edu); Bakar Labs: bench/lab lease	Berkeley, CA	Biotech, general startups

PROGRAM	MODEL	FUNDING / EQUITY	PRIMARY US LOCATIONS	FOCUS
The Engine (MIT)	Nonprofit lab-space incubator	No equity; monthly fee model, grants available (Source: engine.xyz)	Cambridge, MA	"Tough Tech" incl. biotech
Y Combinator	Generalist accelerator, large bio/health portfolio	\$500K for 7% (Source: ycombinator.com)	San Francisco Bay Area	All sectors; 600 healthcare startups listed (Source: ycombinator.com)
a16z speedrun (Bio + Health)	VC-run cohort accelerator	\$500K for 10% via SAFE, plus further \$500K option (Source: speedrun.a16z.com)	San Francisco	AI, health, deep tech
Plug and Play Life Sciences	Corporate-matching accelerator network	Varies by cohort; 60+ programs run annually (Source: plugandplayapac.com)	Sunnyvale, CA and regional hubs	Life sciences, corporate partnerships

The table illustrates a structural split: several programs (JLABS, BioLabs, MassChallenge, LabCentral, Alexandria LaunchLabs, CIC, StartX, and The Engine) state that they take no equity, while venture-backed programs may invest through equity or convertible instruments. Terms vary by provider and transaction structure: published fixed-equity terms in this comparison range from 7.5% to 10%, while YC's separate uncapped MFN SAFE may create additional dilution and Illumina Ventures Labs does not state current terms publicly. Founders should compare the full investment documents, fees, and any follow-on rights rather than assume a standard deal across programs.

Equity-Free Life Science Incubator Networks

JLABS, operated by Johnson & Johnson Innovation, describes itself as a "no-strings-attached life science incubator and accelerators" network that provides infrastructure, expertise, funding connections, and visibility without taking equity (Source: jlabs.jnjinnovation.com). The network reports more than **1,240 member companies and residents globally** and over **\$173 billion in secured and contingent funding** raised by those companies, along with more than **530 deals or partnerships** between J&J and member companies (Source: jlabs.jnjinnovation.com) (Source: jlabs.jnjinnovation.com). Trade coverage of the network puts the count at **13 physical locations worldwide, predominately in the US**, hosting **777 companies** that have collectively closed **\$58 billion** in publicly disclosed deals, including **44 IPOs and 35 acquisitions**; the same coverage notes that **32% of JLABS companies are women-led and 30% are ethnic-minority-led**, well above reported industry averages of 1% and 8% (Source: fiercebiotech.com) (Source: fiercebiotech.com). Applications run through a dedicated online portal.

BioLabs runs an "international, membership based network of shared lab and office facilities located in key biotech innovation clusters," and reports it has supported **over 500 life science companies** since launch, whose member-launched companies have collectively **raised more than \$5 billion** and **created over 1,200 jobs** (Source: biolabs.io) (Source: biolabs.io). Rather than equity, BioLabs monetizes through per-bench membership billing, and it operates a pharma-sponsored **"Golden Ticket" program** that awards a year of free membership and dedicated bench access to selected startups (Source: biolabs.io).

MassChallenge, based in Boston, runs a **Healthcare & Life Sciences vertical** alongside its other challenge tracks, and states that its 2026 **Healthcare & Life Sciences Traction** program is "no-cost, non-dilutive," with **no program fee and no equity taken**, running for **10 high-intensity weeks** aimed at pre-seed through Series A-plus startups (Source: masschallenge.org) (Source: masschallenge.org). Across its network, MassChallenge reports that **4,300 alumni have raised a cumulative \$14 billion** and created **250,000 jobs**, and in its 2024 healthcare cohort the organization evaluated **380 healthcare applications** through a three-round judging process, drawing from a pool of over 200 startups that have gone through its health-related programs since 2016 (Source: masschallenge.org) (Source: masschallenge.org).

Wet-Lab Real Estate Incubators for Life Sciences Startups

For founders searching "biotech startup incubators near me," the wet-lab real estate model is often the most literal answer: these organizations lease turnkey, permitted laboratory space rather than running cohort curricula. **LabCentral** in Cambridge, Massachusetts operates over **210,000 square feet** across its network, supporting as many as **125 startups**, with its flagship 700 Main Street site alone housing **65 to 75 companies** and its LabCentral 238 process-development facility accommodating up to **13 mid-stage companies** (Source: labcentral.org) (Source: labcentral.org). Its 2025 impact report states resident and alumni companies have **raised \$21.85 billion since LabCentral opened in 2013**, including **\$1.25 billion in 2025 alone**, and have launched **171 clinical trials** while receiving **1,846 patents** (Source: labcentral.org) (Source: labcentral.org). Eligibility for its flagship site is capped: companies are ineligible if they have "raised more than \$10 million in capital or generated over \$3 million in revenue" in the trailing 12 months, and admission runs through an online application, an operations call, and a pitch to a selection committee (Source: labcentral.org). LabCentral does not publish flat pricing, stating that cost "depends on your specific needs, including lab space, equipment, and additional services," though its **Golden Ticket program** has awarded over **150 tickets since 2013**, each worth roughly \$50,000 in space and services (Source: labcentral.org) (Source: labcentral.org).

Alexandria LaunchLabs, operated by real estate investment trust Alexandria Real Estate Equities, positions itself as "the premier life science startup engine" and operates growth platforms in **Cambridge, New York City, Research Triangle, the San Francisco Bay Area, Seattle, and San Diego** (Source: alexandrialaunchlabs.com) (Source: alexandrialaunchlabs.com). Beyond dedicated lab and office space, it offers "access to capital through Alexandria Venture Investments and the Alexandria Seed Capital Platform," and runs a related growth-stage platform, GradLabs, in San Diego (Source: alexandrialaunchlabs.com). The organization's first Cambridge location opened at One Kendall Square in December 2018 (Source: investor.are.com).

Cambridge Innovation Center (CIC) has expanded from a single Kendall Square location in 1999 to over **1.5 million square feet** of workspace, labs, and event space globally, with more than **10,000 client organizations** having used CIC as their home and **\$17 billion** in capital raised by CIC clients (Source: cic.com) (Source: cic.com). Dedicated wet-lab offerings, described as "modern commercial wet labs that offer full equipment and as many benches your team needs," are concentrated in Philadelphia and St. Louis, and all CIC space uses flexible 30-day membership terms rather than long-term leases; a private office in its Boston location starts at **\$1,585 per month** (Source: cic.com) (Source: cic.com).

University-Affiliated Biotech Incubators and Accelerators

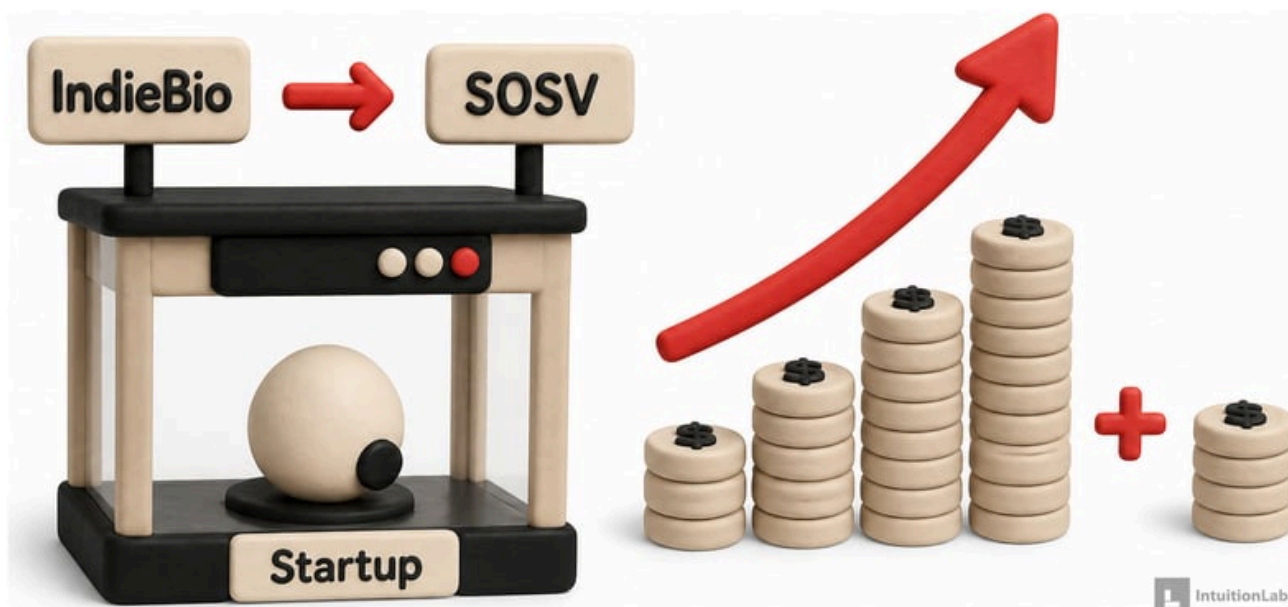
University-affiliated programs are a distinct fourth category, blending campus resources with either equity-free community models or accelerator-style investment. **StartX**, Stanford's founder community, states plainly: "We take no equity and charge no fees," positioning its Accelerator Program as "the first step in joining the StartX Community" (Source: startx.com) (Source: startx.com). StartX reports its companies have **raised an average of \$44 million**, that **29 alumni companies are valued at over \$1 billion**, and that across its history **93% of its venture-backed companies** (those with \$3 million or more raised) are still growing or have been acquired; members also gain access to over **\$1.2 million in free partner resources** (Source: startx.com) (Source: startx.com).

UC Berkeley's SkyDeck operates on the opposite economic model: its six-month Cohort Program invests **\$210,000 for 7.5% equity**, structured through a post-money SAFE-like instrument, and the SkyDeck Fund can invest an additional **10% of a company's first institutional round** after graduation (Source: skydeck.berkeley.edu) (Source: skydeck.berkeley.edu). SkyDeck's Bio+Health Track adds "up to 12 months of sponsored access to bench top space at a local lab," and the SkyDeck Fund overall reports over **130 investments within three years** of launch (Source: skydeck.berkeley.edu) (Source: skydeck.berkeley.edu). Adjacent to SkyDeck, **Bakar Labs**, created jointly by UC Berkeley and QB3, is described as "a world-class incubator for life-science startups" offering fully-equipped BSL-2 labs where "tenants can lease individual benches and desks in shared space, or private offices and labs," alongside a mentoring track through which companies can pitch for **\$100,000 awards** (Source: bakarlabs.berkeley.edu) (Source: bakarlabs.berkeley.edu).

The Engine, created by MIT in 2016 to support "Tough Tech" ventures, has evolved structurally: its original venture fund spun out as the independent, for-profit **Engine Ventures** in 2023, while The Engine itself formally became a **501(c)(3) nonprofit** in 2025, distinct from the investment fund (Source: engine.xyz) (Source: engine.xyz). As a nonprofit, The Engine provides resident companies with **220,000 square feet** of managed lab, engineering, and office space, including over **60,000 square feet of BSL-2 wet-lab space**, and explicitly states, "No, The Engine does not take an equity stake or form a business relationship with Residents," instead charging a monthly fee that varies by space and offering grants to teams with limited funding; the organization reports over **150 resident companies** across 19 Tough Tech industries (Source: engine.xyz) (Source: engine.xyz) (Source: engine.xyz).

Equity-Taking Biotech Accelerators and AI Drug Discovery Venture Programs

Historically, the best-known biotech-specific accelerator has been **IndieBio**, run by early-stage investor SOSV, which its own site describes as "Silicon Valley's first biotech program to offer bio-labs on site as well as pre-seed investment" (Source: indiebio.co). IndieBio states that its **310 graduate companies have raised \$3.6 billion combined**, and an archived January 2026 snapshot of its site put per-company initial investment at **\$550,000**, cumulative companies funded at **270**, and portfolio value created at over **\$12 billion**, with founders from 40 countries and 42% female founders (Source: indiebio.co) (Source: web.archive.org). At the start of 2026, SOSV retired the standalone "IndieBio" brand, folding operations into SOSV NY and SOSV SF; startups can also qualify for an additional **\$250,000** through SOSV's Genesis Consortium (Source: indiebio.co) (Source: indiebio.co).



The former **Illumina Accelerator**, genomics-focused since 2014, offered "up to \$200,000 in convertible notes" plus a \$20,000 line of credit in exchange for "a 7% common share stake, fully diluted," across **two six-month cycles per year** (Source: illumina.com) (Source: illumina.com). In 2023, it joined Illumina Ventures and relaunched as **Illumina Ventures Labs**; Illumina does not present the former Accelerator terms as current Ventures Labs terms. Across the original 2014–2023 run, Illumina reports that the Accelerator launched **74 startups**, of which **93% raised follow-on capital** totaling **\$1.2 billion**, with **47% having female founders** (Source: illumina.com) (Source: illumina.com).

Petri Bio, based in Boston and "co-founded and funded by Pillar VC," describes itself as developing "pre-seed companies attacking the world's largest problems at the frontier of biology and engineering" (Source: petri.bio) (Source: petri.bio). Trade press coverage describes the program's original structure as a "12-month program that includes at least \$250,000 in seed funding, lab space," though Petri's current site emphasizes its pre-seed venture-formation model over specific check size, and it also runs a free virtual exploration program called Frequency (Source: fiercebiotech.com) (Source: petri.bio).

For "top biotech venture accelerators for AI drug discovery startups," several generalist programs now field substantial biotech portfolios. **Y Combinator** invests **\$125,000 for 7%** through a post-money SAFE plus **\$375,000 through an uncapped MFN SAFE**, which can create additional dilution, charges no fees, and lists **600 healthcare startups** funded to date (Source: ycombinator.com) (Source: ycombinator.com). Andreessen Horowitz's **Bio + Health** practice positions itself as a venture partner rather than a classic accelerator, but its **speedrun** program, open to AI and deep-tech founders including biotech, invests up to **\$1 million** per company, has deployed over **\$200 million across more than 250 startups** since 2023, runs **12 intensive weeks** in San Francisco, and reports an acceptance rate **below 0.4%** (Source: a16z.com) (Source: speedrun.a16z.com) (Source: speedrun.a16z.com). **Plug and Play**, a corporate-matching accelerator platform, "runs 60+ startup accelerator programs each year" and connects startups to a network of over **30,000 global startups**, including life-sciences-specific cohorts that pair founders with pharmaceutical and diagnostics corporate partners (Source: plugandplayapac.com) (Source: plugandplayapac.com). Internationally, London-based **Deep Science Ventures** offers a comparable venture-creation model, giving founders "up to 18 months to form a company" and reporting an **82% company survival rate**, illustrating that the AI-drug-discovery accelerator model is not confined to the United States (Source: deepscienceventures.com) (Source: deepscienceventures.com).

Incubator vs. Accelerator: Funding Terms and How to Apply

The single most consequential decision for a biotech founder choosing between programs is economic: does the program take equity, and if so, how much? Available data suggest a fairly narrow band for equity-taking programs, generally **7% to 10%**, consistent with the CRS finding that accelerators typically "provide a small stipend or seed investment in exchange for some equity" (Source: [congress.gov](https://www.congress.gov)). Illumina Ventures Labs and Y Combinator both take **7%**, SkyDeck takes **7.5%** as detailed above, and a16z speedrun takes **10%**, while IndieBio/SOSV's terms vary by deal structure around its roughly \$550,000 check (Source: illumina.com) (Source: ycombinator.com) (Source: speedrun.a16z.com). By contrast, the equity-free organizations in this report (JLABS, BioLabs, MassChallenge, StartX, and The Engine) fund their operations through corporate sponsorship, membership fees, philanthropy, or university backing rather than portfolio returns.

Application processes vary by provider and program cycle. Common checkpoints can include:

- **Online application:** providers may use an online application, with either rolling or cohort-specific deadlines.
- **Eligibility screening:** some programs cap eligibility by funding raised or company stage, as with LabCentral's flagship-site cap described above.
- **Interview or pitch:** LabCentral documents an operations call followed by a pitch to a selection committee; other providers may use different review methods ([LabCentral resident applications](#)).
- **Cohort start or move-in:** cohort accelerators have defined program dates, while lab-space providers may admit companies as space and eligibility permit. Founders should check the current process for each program before applying.

For founders who prefer **non-dilutive** funding over any equity-taking program, the federal **Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR)** program, run through sbir.gov, is explicitly structured as "equity free funding through federal agencies," with **Phase I awards reaching up to \$323,090** and **Phase II awards up to \$2,153,927** without requiring a special waiver as of April 2026 (Source: sbir.gov) (Source: sbir.gov) (Source: sbir.gov). The **National Institutes of Health (NIH)** is described on sbir.gov as "the largest granting organization participating in the SBIR" program within the life sciences, making it a common complement, or alternative, to a private accelerator track (Source: sbir.gov).

Data Analysis and Evidence

Table 2 situates the incubator and accelerator landscape within the broader US biotech funding environment, drawing on originator data from PitchBook-NVCA, the Biotechnology Innovation Organization (BIO), and federal SBIR/STTR reporting.

Table 2: Key US Biotech Funding and Program Metrics (as of 2026)

METRIC	FIGURE	SOURCE / AS-OF DATE
US life-sciences VC deal value, 2025	\$36.3 billion across 1,827 deals	PitchBook-NVCA Venture Monitor, Dec. 31, 2025 (Source: nvca.org)
US life-sciences VC deal value, 2021 peak	\$55.1 billion	PitchBook-NVCA Venture Monitor, Dec. 31, 2025 (Source: nvca.org)
Biotechs going public annually	Fell from ~40/year to 15 in 2023 , partial recovery in 2025	BIO.org, July 28, 2025 (Source: bio.org)
Biotech startup funding, Q1 vs. Q2 2025	Dropped from \$2.6B to \$900M	BIO.org, July 28, 2025 (Source: bio.org)
Novel FDA drug approvals from emerging biotechs, 2024	36 of 54 novel approvals	BIO.org report, June 17, 2025 (Source: bio.org)
NIH cumulative SBIR/STTR awards	37,060 awards , largest of any federal grantor for life sciences	SBIR.gov awards database (Source: sbir.gov)
All-agency SBIR/STTR obligations, FY2022	\$4.12B SBIR + \$618.3M STTR = \$4.73B total	SBA/SBIR.gov FY2022 Annual Report (Source: sbir.gov)
SBIR/STTR total awards, 2024 vs. 2025	6,412 awards (2024) vs. 5,220 (2025)	SBIR.gov awards database (Source: sbir.gov)
InBIA Impact Index program-type split	65% incubation, 36% accelerator cohorts, of 97 ESOs surveyed	InBIA, FY23 data (Source: inbia.org)

The data reveal a funding environment under real strain even as the incubator and accelerator network has kept expanding. BIO's Director of Industry Analysis is quoted describing a sharp compression in public-market access: "we went from having 40 companies a year going public, down to 15 in 2023, and now we're back up in 2025," alongside a report that biotech startup funding fell from **\$2.6 billion in Q1 2025 to \$900 million in Q2 2025** (Source: bio.org) (Source: bio.org). Yet emerging biotechs, the population these incubators and accelerators are designed to nurture, were behind **36 of the 54 novel FDA drug approvals in 2024**, underscoring why non-dilutive and equity-free program models have grown alongside venture-backed ones (Source: bio.org).

Independent research on accelerator effectiveness broadly, not limited to biotech, offers a cautiously positive read. A 2025 peer-reviewed meta-analysis synthesizing **21 primary studies and 68 effect sizes** found "a statistically significant positive effect of accelerator participation" on venture performance, against a backdrop in which, per Startup Genome data the same paper cites, "only 10% of start-ups survive" globally (Source: link.springer.com) (Source: link.springer.com). For the specific case of NIH SBIR/STTR grants, a peer-reviewed NIH-authored evaluation of the National Institute of General Medical Sciences (NIGMS) program found that of **1,925 Phase I projects** funded through fiscal year 2012, **699 (36.2%) transitioned successfully to Phase II funding** by fiscal year 2015, exceeding the SBA's 25% benchmark; among the top 25 grantee firms, the transition rate reached **68.9%**, compared with **56.4%** in a comparable NASA SBIR/STTR cohort (Source: pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov) (Source: pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov). Of the 1,196 companies that received NIGMS SBIR/STTR funding between 1983 and 2015, an estimated **63% remained active**, **18% had merged or been acquired**, and **16% were no longer active** as of the study's follow-up, illustrating survival dynamics broadly comparable to those reported for private accelerator cohorts (Source: pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov).

Implications and Future Directions

Several organizational changes are visible across the programs profiled in this report. Illumina folded its accelerator into Illumina Ventures Labs in 2023, SOSV retired the standalone IndieBio brand at the start of 2026, and MIT's Engine separated its nonprofit lab-incubation function from its now-independent Engine Ventures fund in 2023 and 2025 respectively (Source: illumina.com) (Source: indiebio.co) (Source: engine.xyz). These examples show differing organizational approaches within the profiled programs; they do not, on their own, establish an industry-wide trend.

Second, generalist accelerators may be relevant to some AI-driven drug-discovery founders. YC lists 600 healthcare startups, and speedrun reports an acceptance rate below 0.4% for its AI-and-deep-tech cohort (Source: [ycombinator.com](https://www.ycombinator.com)) (Source: speedrun.a16z.com). These point-in-time figures do not establish that such programs are capturing a growing share of biotech deal flow, but they show that a relevant program need not carry a life-sciences brand name.

Third, the funding environment documented in this report, a **\$36.3 billion 2025 US life-sciences VC market still well below its 2021 peak of \$55.1 billion**, alongside a compressed biotech IPO window, is pushing more founders toward non-dilutive and equity-free paths: JLABS, BioLabs, MassChallenge, StartX, The Engine, and the federal SBIR/STTR program collectively represent a substantial share of available support that does not require giving up a percentage of the company (Source: [nvca.org](https://www.nvca.org)). As portfolio companies from these programs mature into commercial-stage organizations, they typically face a second wave of build-versus-buy decisions around regulated enterprise software, quality systems, and commercial analytics platforms, the domain where specialist advisory firms such as intuitionlabs.ai, an official Veeva Vault CRM X-Pages partner, work alongside pharmaceutical and life-sciences clients on implementation, AI adoption, and technology roadmapping rather than on incubation itself (Source: intuitionlabs.ai).

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What is the difference between a biotech incubator and a biotech accelerator? An incubator, per the Congressional Research Service, is "designed to support entrepreneurs in the very early stages" over an open-ended timeline, typically providing lab space and infrastructure, while an accelerator is a fixed-term, cohort-based program that usually provides "a small stipend or seed investment in exchange for some equity" (Source: [congress.gov](https://www.congress.gov)) (Source: [congress.gov](https://www.congress.gov)). In practice, LabCentral and The Engine function as incubators, while IndieBio/SOSV, Y Combinator, and a16z speedrun are cohort-based accelerator programs. Illumina Ventures Labs evolved from the former Illumina Accelerator and should be evaluated against its current published offering.

How does a founder apply to a biotech accelerator? Application processes vary by provider and current program cycle. They may include an online application, eligibility review, and an interview or pitch, but applicants should verify each program's current requirements directly. For example, LabCentral documents an online application, an operations call, and a selection-committee pitch for its resident application process ([LabCentral resident applications](https://www.labcentral.org/resident-applications)).

Do biotech accelerators take equity, and how much? Equity-taking programs in this report cluster between **7% and 10%**: Illumina Ventures Labs and Y Combinator take 7%, Berkeley SkyDeck takes 7.5%, and a16z speedrun takes 10% (Source: [illumina.com](https://www.illumina.com)) (Source: speedrun.a16z.com). Roughly half of the programs profiled, including JLABS, BioLabs, MassChallenge, StartX, and The Engine, take no equity at all.

Are there biotech incubators near a founder's home base? Coverage concentrates in a handful of hubs: Boston/Cambridge (LabCentral, The Engine, Petri Bio, MassChallenge, CIC), the San Francisco Bay Area (IndieBio/SOSV SF, Illumina Ventures Labs, a16z speedrun, Y Combinator, Berkeley SkyDeck/Bakar Labs), New York City (SOSV NY, Alexandria LaunchLabs), San Diego (Alexandria LaunchLabs, JLABS, GradLabs), and Stanford, California (StartX), with JLABS and BioLabs also operating additional regional sites (Source: [alexandrialaunchlabs.com](https://www.alexandrialaunchlabs.com)).

Are there non-dilutive alternatives to a biotech accelerator? Yes: the federal SBIR program offers "equity free funding," with Phase I awards up to \$323,090 and Phase II awards up to \$2,153,927 as of April 2026, and NIH is the largest life-sciences grantor within that system (Source: [sbir.gov](https://www.sbir.gov)) (Source: [sbir.gov](https://www.sbir.gov)).

Conclusion

The US biotech incubator and accelerator landscape as of August 2026 spans four distinct operating models: equity-free corporate and nonprofit networks; wet-lab real-estate incubators; university-affiliated programs; and venture-backed accelerators and venture-creation programs. No single program is universally best: the appropriate option depends on whether a founder needs bench space, non-dilutive support, a fixed-term cohort, or venture capital and an investor network.

Founders should compare program economics as carefully as brand reputation. Equity, investment amount, fees, follow-on rights, and transaction structure vary by program, and current terms should be confirmed directly with each provider. No-equity lab memberships and federal non-dilutive funding can be alternatives or complements to venture-backed programs.

Tags: biotech incubators, biotech accelerators, life sciences incubators, startup accelerator funding, JLABS, IndieBio, BioLabs, LabCentral, AI drug discovery startups, SBIR grants

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