

INNOVATIONS FOR DEFENCE EXCELLENCE

In a nutshell: Innovations for defence excellence (iDEX) is a unique initiative that is the only channel that provides the startups of India a direct link to the defence industry and creates a platform for the ease of doing business with the Ministry of Defence.

Nodal agency: Defence Innovation Organisation (DIO) under the aegis of Department of Defence Production, Ministry of Defence

The iDEX framework was launched by the Government of India with the aim to foster innovation and technology development in defence and aerospace sector by engaging industries including MSMEs, start-ups, individual innovators, R&D Institutes, and academia, and promote self-reliance. The initiative is unique as it is the only channel that creates conditions for the start-up ecosystem to directly engage with defence and creates a platform for ease of doing business with the Ministry of Defence (MoD). The MoD has also created avenues for procurement by the services in accordance with Chapter III of Defence Acquisition Procedure 2020 (DAP-2020) from iDEX winners. It aligns itself with the goal of indigenisation and supports the vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat.

After the launch of iDEX and operationalisation of DIO, significant strides have been made to foster innovation and synergy in the engagement of Ministry of Defence with the R&D institutes, academia, industries, start-ups and individual innovators. The DIO is trading with efficacious methodology which effectively translates the intent into implementation.

The start-ups are selected and managed as innovation partners and not merely as vendors, and the desired co-creation engagement between the sponsor (challenge owner) and the start-up is intended to be managed with the best practices of technology and product management as opposed to being administered purely through the traditional project and financial/cost management approach.

The start-ups are given the flexibility to operate with autonomy, if the decisions made by them are backed by sound implementation, indicating measurable progress towards these desired metrics and outcomes.

Features of iDEX:

- The Defence Acquisition Procedure-2020 ensures that once a prototype is developed, only the successful developers through iDEX stand a chance of getting the order.
- The procurement cycle is shortened, already two iDEX winners have got orders, in less than 24 months of their iDEX Contracts.
- The iDEX grant has boosted the prospects of cash strapped talent to contribute in this capital intensive sector.

- The academia, defence forces, innovators have come closer to achieve the common aim.
- Self-sufficiency and indigenization have gotten a shot in the arm.
- Other ministries/departments have become associated with iDEX to utilize the branding and outreach available; some have also started similar schemes.

Impact

- The engagement of iDEX has now swelled up to almost 150 iDEX winners, thus contributing to the generation of employment, both direct and indirect, of thousands of skilled and semi-skilled Indians. With the transition of the iDEX winners into manufacturing enterprises, the employment generation would be in lakhs.
- The iDEX is also featured as a procurement avenue under the defence acquisition procedure, which lays the guidelines for the defence procurement. Recently, the procurement procedure was simplified, as well as 14 products developed under the umbrella of iDEX were granted the acceptance of necessity for procurement of about ₹380.43 crore by Government of India assuring all our startups and motivating them to continue working on the myriad of solutions being innovated and developed by them.

Challenges

1. Some of the existing processes and trends in the defence sector which require change are:
 - a) Long gestation period from identification of requirement in defence, to placement of order, leading to higher costs, disillusionment of smaller firms/ startups/MSMEs, which in turn led to brain drain of the illustrious, innovative minds and under-employment.
 - b) Limited/ difficult access to the defence personnel/ facilities, leading to poor understanding of the defence requirements.
 - c) The above made seeding of defence enterprises a difficult task, leading to less jobs and low talent in the defence sector, in turn, the indigenization, and self-sufficiency levels are low.

Rewards and recognition

Team iDEX has been awarded with the Prime Minister's Award for Excellence in Public Administration, 2021, in the category "Innovation-Central". There are plans to scale up iDEX-DIO for meeting future requirements related to 2000 contracts for prototype development by the end of March 2024.



Start-ups interacting with Union Defence Minister, Shri Rajnath Singh and other officials from the Ministry of Defence (MoD)