SQUADRON INNOVATION FUND (SIF) MARKETPLACE PLAYBOOK

Reimagining Air Force Innovation Funding

"The changing character of war will privilege lethality, speed, agility and resilience. We must aggressively transform into a force that can leverage the capabilities we're developing … You are the critical advantage. You have the ideas and the ingenuity to help us accelerate, and fly, fight and win."

– Gen David Allvin, CSAF #23

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Playbook Background: What is the SIF?

The Squadron Innovation Fund (SIF) Marketplace is a virtual platform designed to streamline and democratize the funding process for innovative initiatives within the Department of the Air Force (DAF). Hosted within the <u>Mobilize VISION</u> platform, it allows Airmen and Guardians to present and share their ideas directly with other innovators and, more specifically, squadron commanders, who can then allocate virtual tokens—each worth $100—to fund these initiatives. VISION also serves as the military's collaboration space for innovation, with users working on initiatives and making connection points between people and resources within and across ecosystems.

History of SIF

SIF started in 2018 under the direction of CSAF #21 General Goldfein, who said, "*We need our squadrons to be aggressively persistent and take risks in the pursuit of new ideas and solutions. No one knows our daily problems more than the Airmen in our squadrons.*" Historically, SIF dollars were pushed directly from Headquarters Air Force (HAF) through MAJCOMs and eventually down to wings and squadrons. Commanders were expected to spend their SIF dollars on innovative ideas without much support or background on intent. Often, this caused confusion, resulting in a lack of SIF utilization or spending SIF on items/initiatives that didn't meet the intent. Additionally, squadron commanders had no platform or mechanism to view, benchmark, or be inspired by other unit initiatives, or to be able to pool resources with other squadron commanders facing similar challenges to achieve scale. Not using a platform to collect ideas also resulted in unintentional duplication of efforts across the force.

The initial guidance from SIF in 2017 included this explanation:

"Our job as leaders is to unleash the brilliance in our Airmen & create an environment where great ideas get a hearing...80% of the money will go directly to squadron commanders entrusted with mission success, and 20% will go to [wings] to accelerate the best ideas..."

Why is the DAF using a new model?

The SIF Marketplace as it appears in the VISION platform.
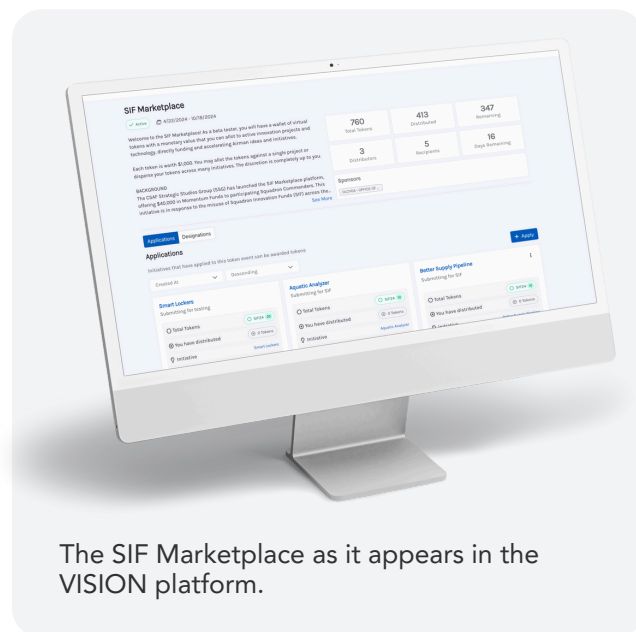
Because of these results, a new model will empower squadron commanders and wings to pursue problems collaboratively. Instead of taking a given amount of money and delivering it directly to units, 50% of the previously allocated dollars are turned into digital tokens while the other 50% will remain unchanged. This gives commanders the ability to allocate resources to any idea within VISION directly where innovative solutions are being worked with tokens while maintaining the ability to swipe a unit GPC for off-the-shelf solutions or existing offerings (*eg* combining existing hardware and software solutions to create a new operational tool). Additionally, this new approach will help squadron commanders garner support from their fellow commanders for their team's especially impactful ideas.

This new token model also eliminates traditional cross-MAJCOM funding barriers and fosters collaboration across the enterprise by enabling the pooling of resources to identify and solve critical or crosscutting challenges or take advantage of emerging opportunities at scale. The platform ensures that innovative initiatives are seen, tracked, and supported, with funds efficiently distributed from the HAF level to the initiatives that meet the criteria. This model encourages innovation and provides a structured, transparent, and collaborative environment to bring Airmen's and Guardians' ideas to fruition.

Playbook Summary:
- Implement a new funding model to empower commanders and foster collaboration.
- Allocate 50% of funding into digital tokens and retain the rest as traditional funds.
- Commanders can allocate tokens to any idea within VISION.
- Eliminate traditional funding barriers and enable resource pooling.
- Ensure initiative visibility, tracking, and support.
- Encourage innovation and provide transparency.

Expected Outcomes:
- Improved collaborative problem-solving and resource allocation.
- Increased visibility and support for innovative initiatives.
- Foster a culture of innovation and transparency.

How is funding allocated and distributed

The SIF budget is allocated to each MAJCOM based on the number of people, squadrons, wings, etc. The numbers will be reassessed yearly based on manpower data and the SIF budget for the FY.

The intent is for wings to receive 20% of their SIF budget (to pursue projects, acquire resources, innovation education, innovation-related TDYs, etc.). In comparison, the remaining 80% will be available for squadron level innovation efforts. The SIF dollar amounts received by each MAJCOM, wing, and squadron will fluctuate yearly based on manpower data. The upcoming reorganizations will significantly affect the traditional SIF allocations.

How does this process work?

The SIF process begins with Airmen and Guardians submitting their innovation initiatives into the VISION platform, where other innovators, functional communities, stakeholders, and most importantly, squadron commanders with SIF tokens can see and support them. At the beginning of each FY, squadron commanders are given virtual tokens loaded into a virtual wallet within VISION. Commanders can allocate tokens directly to any initiatives submitted to the SIF Marketplace they want to support at any point during the SIF funding window. This includes initiatives outside their squadron, group, wing, and MAJCOM.

For example, if a functional community identifies a problem or need and subsequently places that idea into VISION, squadron commanders from across the DAF can allocate

tokens to that initiative, amplifying the effects of the token system and allowing the entire community to benefit from that problem/solution space. These tokens are pooled across commands to support the most promising ideas. After the quarterly funding window closes, initiatives that meet the minimum token threshold proceed to further development by receiving the tokens earned during the funding window. The funds are then transferred quarterly from HAF to the initiatives, with continuous tracking and support from AFWERX and HAF to ensure scalability and impact.

When are the open windows for idea submission and funding?

Ideas can and should be submitted year-round. At the end of each quarterly tranche, HAF will identify which initiatives met their minimum token threshold and distribute the funds directly to the unit of the member who submitted the idea.
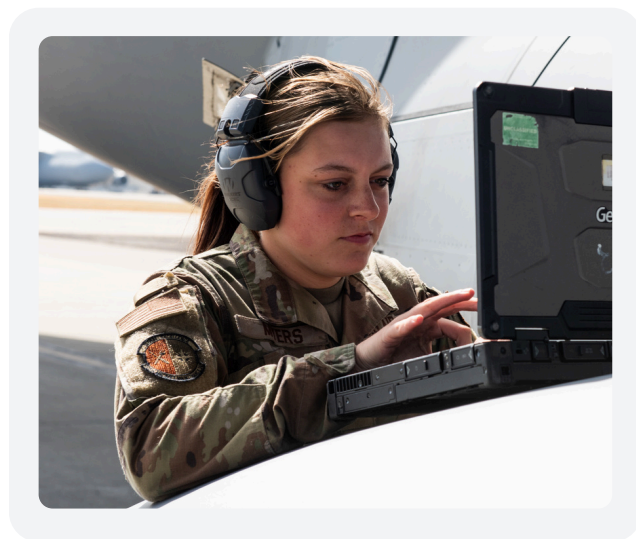
Pro Tip ⚡

Submitters must update their VISION profile with their correct unit to ensure the funds flow to the correct organization.

Learn how to update your organization's information in VISION here.

What is the role of the idea submitters?

Anyone who submits ideas plays a crucial role in identifying challenges and proposing innovative solutions. Their job is to present their ideas clearly and concisely while ensuring their solution is feasible, and telling the story of the potential impacts. Each idea will be required to identify a minimum and maximum funding threshold. This will allow commanders and others to better understand the milestones that can be accomplished with a given amount of money. Once funded, innovators work their ideas with support and resources from the SIF Marketplace to help turn their innovations into reality. Anyone can submit an idea, including Airmen/Guardians, civilians, and even squadron commanders.

What is the role of the squadron commander?

In the SIF Marketplace, the squadron commander's role is straightforward and empowering. Commanders receive virtual tokens, which they can allocate towards innovative initiatives submitted by innovators that will positively impact them. Commanders now have the freedom to support any ideas within the campaign, while collaborating with

other commanders or functional communities to pool resources and fund the best ideas. Their involvement is simple yet vital, as it allows them to directly influence the development of solutions that address real challenges aligned with their mission, within a system that handles the funding and tracking processes.

How are squadron commanders expected to spend tokens?

Squadron commanders receive their annual tokens up front, allowing them to allocate all their tokens in the first tranche or hold onto them for future tranches throughout the year. This enables commanders to decide when and where to invest based on the evolving needs and opportunities they observe. However, to ensure that all resources are fully utilized, any remaining tokens at the final fiscal year tranche will be removed from the digital wallets within VISION and reallocated to initiatives that can benefit from additional funding. This ensures that the SIF budget is utilized before the FM team must pull it for use prior to the end of the FY. This system also ensures that every token contributes to advancing innovative ideas while providing commanders with control and strategic decision-making power throughout the year.

An Equal Playing Field

The SIF Marketplace is designed to be a competitive yet fair opportunity where participants can secure significantly more funding than they would through the traditional SIF process. Participants can maximize their impact by understanding mission dynamics, including token allocation and collaboration with other commanders, and timing their investments across tranches.

This levels the playing field, allowing all Airmen and Guardians, regardless of rank, to present

ideas and compete for resources to scale the best efforts. By grasping the rules and leveraging the platform effectively, you can crowdsource support across the DAF, outpacing what you might receive through conventional funding and driving your innovative initiatives to success. Additionally, community support/votes is valuable demand data for other enterprise stakeholders to inform policy, other investments, or even follow on investment with other funds.

Team Best Practices

Comms and Collab

In the SIF Marketplace, communication and collaboration are key strategies for enhancing the success of funding the best ideas. By actively engaging with others, you can pool tokens, share insights, and rally support for initiatives that align with broader mission goals.

Forge Alliances and Teams

Creating an alliance within the SIF Marketplace is a powerful strategy for scaling and adopting novel ideas that would otherwise be a challenge for an Airman or Guardian to advance.

By forming partnerships with like-minded individuals and commanders, you can consolidate support, resources, and expertise, making it possible to push groundbreaking initiatives through the funding pipeline.

Level of Impact

It's crucial to delineate between "easy wins" that can be quickly addressed with a unit's annual budget authority and more ambitious ideas that have the potential for a broader department-wide impact. These higher-level initiatives require more substantial investment and collaboration, making them ideal candidates for the competitive and strategic funding environment that the Marketplace provides.

Failure

SIF isn't about only trying ideas that will succeed—it's also intended to be used as an experiment fund. A little money can go a long way if you can prove a hypothesis or demonstrate a proof of concept. Using SIF to show that something works (or doesn't!) can help unlock additional dollars from organizations to progress an initiative.

How-to Plays

Key Play: Determine What Kind of User I am.

1. Idea Airman: The Innovator

User Profile: An innovator who identifies challenges and proposes innovative solutions.

Play by Play Example:

- **Initiation:** The Idea Airman identifies a critical issue affecting their squadron's operations. They draft a clear and concise initiative in VISION outlining their innovative solution and its potential impact.
- **Collaboration:** They reach out to the Spark Cell for guidance, ensuring their proposal meets the minimum and maximum funding thresholds required for SIF submission.
- **Submission:** They input their idea to the VISION platform early in the funding cycle and submit it to the SIF Token Event to qualify for matching funds.
- **Funding Milestones:**
  - **Tranche 1:** They achieve the minimum funding threshold, securing initial tokens.
  - **Tranche 2:** By effectively promoting their idea and gathering support, they maximize their funding allocation.
- **Execution:** With the secured funds, the Idea Airman begins executing the initiative, collaborating with the Spark Cell on resources and guidance.
- **Continuity:** As the initiative progresses, the team plans for its continuation into the next fiscal year, setting the stage for further innovation.

2. Spark Cell: The Facilitator

User Profile: Teams supporting innovation and managing portfolios in VISION.

Play by Play Example:

- **Management:** The Spark Cell supports the initiatives, ensuring all resources and education are available.
- **Resource Allocation:** They actively engage with squadron commanders (Sq/CCs) to understand their needs and encourage them to allocate tokens to aligned initiatives.
- **Support Provider:** The Spark Cell offers resources, guidance, and strategic support to both Idea Airman and Sq/CCs, helping them navigate the process effectively.
- **Outreach:** They conduct workshops and information sessions to familiarize users with resources and SIF to enhance participation and idea submissions.

For squadron commanders, there are several role approaches you can take below. The Decisive Leader, the Delegator, The Strategic Investor, and The Community Focused Leader. Read through each, and decide which SIF investment approach works best for you.

3. Squadron Commander: The Decisive Leader

User Profile: A squadron commander with a packed schedule.

Play by Play Example:

- **Quick Access:** The Busy Sq/CC logs into the VISION platform, where they are greeted by a streamlined interface.
- **Token Allocation:** They quickly assess the initiatives in SIF and allocate their tokens for the fiscal year, focusing on impactful initiatives without extensive deliberation.

- **Trust in Process:** Confident in the method, they don't worry about oversight, trusting that the platform will handle the funding distribution and tracking efficiently, instead focusing on what investments support their unit's priorities.

4. Squadron Commander: The Collaborator

User Profile: An extremely busy Sq/CC who manages multiple responsibilities.

Play by Play Example:

- **Delegation:** The busy Sq/CC realizes that their time constraints prevent them from thoroughly reviewing initiatives. They task a teammate with reviewing eligible initiatives and recommending token allocation.
- **Efficiency:** Commanders can also work with local Spark Cells to learn more about relevant initiatives, ensuring that valuable resources are utilized effectively.

5. Squadron Commander: The Strategic Investor (aka internal Venture Capitalist)

User Profile: The proactive Sq/CC who actively champions innovation.

User Story:

- **Collaboration:** The Venture Capitalist Sq/CC works closely with Idea Airman within their squadron, listening to their initiatives and providing insights to enhance viability.
- **Peer Influence:** They engage with peer Sq/CCs to advocate for promising ideas, building a coalition of support to maximize funding for innovative initiatives.
- **Maximizing Impact:** By pooling resources and collaborating with other commanders, they push for increased funding from the MAJCOM, ensuring the most impactful initiatives receive what they need.

6. Squadron Commander (Local initiative): The Community-Focused Leader

User Profile: A Sq/CC addressing local needs.

Play by Play Example:

- **Local Needs Assessment:** The local initiative Sq/CC identifies a specific operational requirement unique to its squadron and formulates an initiative proposal to address it.
- **SIF Submission:** They submit their initiative through the VISION, clearly articulating the local need and the proposed solution.
- **Funding Utilization:** Upon receiving tokens, the Sq/CC effectively funds the initiative through SIF, ensuring local challenges are met with innovative solutions tailored to their squadron's context.

Key Play: I am a new user. How do I access VISION?

VISION uses Platform One built for the entire DoD to sign on securely. This security is imperative for the data to remain safe. To set up your VISION profile, you must have a Platform One account connected to your DOD CAC.

1. [Click here](#) to create your Platform One account
   a. Heads up! You must use your .mil email. If you don't see your verification email, check your spam folder.
2. Navigate to https://vision.il4.afwerx.dso.mil/initiatives/explore
   a. When you navigate to the application for the first time, you will set up your VISION profile details.
      i. Heads up! Make sure your organization is correct for token allocation

> **Pro Tip:** [You can access VISION on a non-government device](#)

Key Play: How do I submit my initiative for Squadron Innovation Funds?

Innovators can submit their existing initiatives to various token events within VISION to compete for Squadron Innovation Funds.

1. Choose **Token Events** from the main menu (left side of screen) and select the applicable event.
2. Click the blue **Apply+** button and select your initiative from the dropdown menu.
   a. Add the minimum and maximum tokens your event needs (tip: check the token event main page to confirm the value of tokens for the event)

Key Play: I am a squadron commander. How do I allocate tokens to a project in VISION?

Commanders evaluate innovative initiatives and apply tokens to projects that align with their priorities.

1. Choose **Token Events** from the main menu (left side of screen) and select the applicable event.
2. Review submitted initiatives by clicking on the submission and selecting the hyperlinked name next to the initiative.
3. Select the ⋮ icon at the top of the submission and choose **Award Tokens** (you can also cancel awarded tokens here).

> **Pro Tip:** VISION allows organizations to track and manage collaborative innovation efforts, regardless of whether they are part of a token event. Squadron commanders can track token and non-token SIF funding directly within the application.

Looking for help?

You're not alone! You can reach out with questions, and we will be happy to support you to help make the most out of your squadron's innovation funds.

For questions about the SIF program:
AFWERX - SIF Marketplace
af.cvk.innovation@us.af.mil

For help with VISION:
support@mobilizevision.com
(833) 444-5564

"Innovative Airmen find better ways of doing the mission. Their intrapreneurship makes us more lethal, more efficient — they must be supported by leaders who not only remove unnecessary barriers to success, but who also lift up and champion their ideas."

– Gen David Goldfein, CSAF #21