

Seoul Business Agency Hosts Global Innovation Forum, Spotlight on the World's Startup Ecosystem

Seven leading startup ecosystems collaborate to host a pitching competition featuring representative startups from each country

LAS VEGAS, NV, UNITED STATES, January 11, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ --

- Global startup ecosystem players converge, including VCs, media, and startup support organizations, strengthening networking
- Global startups participating in CES invited, expanding opportunities for investment and entry into global markets

The Seoul Business Agency (Seoul Business Agency (SBA), CEO Hyun Woo Kim), a small business support organization dedicated to revitalizing Seoul's startup ecosystem and discovering promising startups, announced that it held the Global Innovation Forum, the largest country pavilion-led global startup ecosystem networking event at CES, on Wednesday, January 7, the second day of CES.

The event marked the first country-based startup competition and networking program at CES. It drew strong attention with a more substantive program than in previous years, through collaboration with seven countries that lead the global startup ecosystem.



Group photo of all media representatives, VCs, startups, and government officials involved in Global Innovation Forum



SBA President presented the Grand Award to Firsthabit of Seoul Pavilion

The Global Innovation Forum began with the goal of using CES, the world's largest exhibition, as a platform to naturally connect startup ecosystems across countries. The initiative was first launched in 2025 under the name "Seoul Innovation Forum," through cooperation among five national pavilions participating in CES. As the first event built on the solidarity of Eureka Park-participating countries at CES, it carried special significance.

□□ A "national pavilion" refers to an exhibition pavilion established and operated by a national institution participating in CES.

The success of the Seoul Innovation Forum stemmed from its demonstration of the potential to evolve beyond individual booth exhibitions into a country-to-country cooperation platform, where global national pavilions gathered in one place and representative innovative startups from each country participated in an IR pitching competition. Building on this success, the program was strengthened and rebranded as the "Global Innovation Forum" from 2026, enabling CES-participating startups to experience more stable and expanded opportunities for global collaboration.

The 2026 Global Innovation Forum was held based on close cooperation among startup support organizations from seven countries. The event was led by the combined efforts of the host organization, Seoul Business Agency (SBA) of the Republic of Korea, TTA, Switzerland Global Enterprise (S-GE), Israel Economic and Trade Office, Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO), Quebec Government Office of Canada, and Business France.

The Global Innovation Forum opened with an IR pitching competition featuring startups selected by each participating country. Following the positive response last year, the competition was held again this year in the same format, with each participating country selecting outstanding



CubicSpace from the Quebec Government Office won the Impact Award



Hua Tec International from TTA won the Scale-up Award

domestic startups to deliver IR pitches to judges and on-site attendees.

Going beyond last year's format, which limited judging to global media representatives, this year's competition featured a judging panel composed of both global media and venture capital (VC) professionals. This change expanded investment opportunities for participating companies and enhanced the competition's credibility.

Participating startups positively evaluated the event, noting that it enabled them to introduce their technologies to VCs to pursue investment opportunities and effectively promote their products and technologies to global media.



Scene from the Panel Talk at GIF 2026

A total of 20 global media representatives and six venture capital professionals participated as judges in the IR pitching competition, evaluating the advanced technologies and visions of startups from seven countries based on criteria such as investment attractiveness and global promotional potential.

As a result of the competition, the Grand Award (first place) was presented to [Firsthabit](#) from the Seoul Pavilion. The Scale-up Award (second place) was awarded to Hua Tech International from the TTA. The Impact Award (third place) went to [CubicSpace](#) from the Quebec Government Office. The winners received trophies along with prize money of USD 3,000, USD 2,000, and USD 1,000, respectively.

Firsthabit, a company from the Seoul Integrated Pavilion that won the Grand Award, said, "We did not expect to win, so this feels like a great reward for all the hard work we have put in. With CES 2026 and the Global Innovation Forum award as a turning point, we plan to seriously pursue entry into the U.S. market."

Even startups that did not receive awards shared positive feedback, saying, "The Global Innovation Forum was a place where startups with diverse cultural and technological backgrounds came together to share insights and strengthen their determination to open global market channels."

The panel discussion that followed featured representatives from participating countries who introduced their respective startup support programs and discussed agendas for the global startup ecosystem. It was a meaningful occasion where the nurturing know-how of organizations that have led the global startup ecosystem by showcasing innovative startups at CES each year was shared in one place.

The significantly strengthened networking session compared to previous years also stood out. In addition to judges, global venture capital firms, media, startups, and startup support organizations visiting CES participated, creating a lively exchange and reinforcing the event's status as the largest global networking program at CES.

During the networking session following the competition, participants freely exchanged views and shared insights on key issues in the tech industry. Startups attending the event welcomed the opportunity to connect with major players in the startup ecosystem and expressed plans to actively leverage the networks formed that day as a bridge to attract investment and enter global markets. This moment demonstrated that the event meaningfully contributed to enhancing the outcomes of startups' CES participation.

In addition, startups that wished to do so were given the opportunity to take the stage for a one-minute PR speech, effectively introducing their innovative technologies to stakeholders across the startup ecosystem. This element also received high praise.

Hyun Woo Kim, President and CEO of the Seoul Business Agency, said, "We hope the Global Innovation Forum will establish itself as a symbolic program representing cross-country cooperation and global startup exchange within CES." He added, "We will continue to develop the forum so that it becomes the most closely watched event by all players in the global startup ecosystem visiting CES, including media, venture capital firms, startups, and national pavilion representatives."

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