

New Partnership Initiative Connects Korean SMEs with Global Market Opportunities

A new round of support is opening for Korean small and medium-sized enterprises seeking to expand overseas through collaboration with larger corporations. The Ministry of SMEs and Startups (MSS) is inviting SMEs to join the 2026 Corporate Partnership for Overseas Expansion Program, an initiative designed to link innovative smaller firms with the global infrastructure and networks of industry-leading companies.

The program is built on a simple but practical idea: while many Korean SMEs have strong technologies and competitive products, they often lack the distribution channels, market access, or operational footholds needed to scale internationally. By partnering with corporations that already operate across global markets, SMEs can tap into established supply chains, platforms, and customer networks to accelerate their entry abroad.

Earlier this year, MSS – working with the Korea Foundation for Cooperation of Large & Small Business, Rural Affairs (KOFCA), which administers the program – selected 25 partnership projects through a competitive process. SMEs are now being invited to participate in these projects as the first round of support for 2026.

The ministry plans to allocate KRW 16.9 billion (approximately USD 12 million) this year, supporting around 50 collaborative projects in total. A second round of project selection is scheduled for May 2026.

A More Collaborative Model for Global Expansion

The 2026 program introduces several structural changes designed to deepen collaboration between corporations and SMEs.

First, multi-corporate partnership projects will be introduced for the first time.

Instead of a single leading company working with SMEs, multiple corporations – such as retailers, digital platforms, or broadcasters – can form a consortium. Each partner contributes its own expertise at different stages of market entry, enabling a more integrated approach to global expansion. For example, content companies and distribution networks may jointly support Korean creative firms seeking to reach overseas consumers.

Second, the program expands long-term project support.

Strategic projects that require sustained investment – such as building overseas production bases or relocating supply chains to third countries – will receive larger funding ceilings. Support for each SME can now reach up to KRW 200 million, four times the previous limit, while project budgets may run up to KRW 2 billion over three years. The scope also now includes “P-turn” strategies, where companies shift production to third-country bases to strengthen global competitiveness.

Third, more projects will focus on globally competitive sectors.

Initiatives in industries such as K-beauty and artificial intelligence will be expanded, combining the global operational know-how of large companies with the innovation capacity of SMEs. These partnerships may include joint marketing campaigns, cross-border platform integration, and inbound promotion targeting international buyers and consumers.

Recent examples illustrate how the model works in practice. In the beauty sector, Olive Young has partnered with emerging brands to help them enter overseas retail channels. In technology, MegazoneCloud has worked with AI solution developers to support international deployment of advanced digital services.

Strengthening the Global Growth Ecosystem

“Overtime, this program has become one of Korea’s most effective models of collaboration between large companies and SMEs,” said Lee Soon-Bae, Director General for Global Growth Policy at MSS. “By combining the

global reach of leading corporations with the innovation of smaller firms, we aim to help Korean SMEs continue building momentum in international markets.”

SMEs interested in joining partnership projects can review participating companies’ calls for applications on Win-Win Nuri, the online platform operated by KOFCA, starting March 9. New project opportunities will be posted throughout the year.

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