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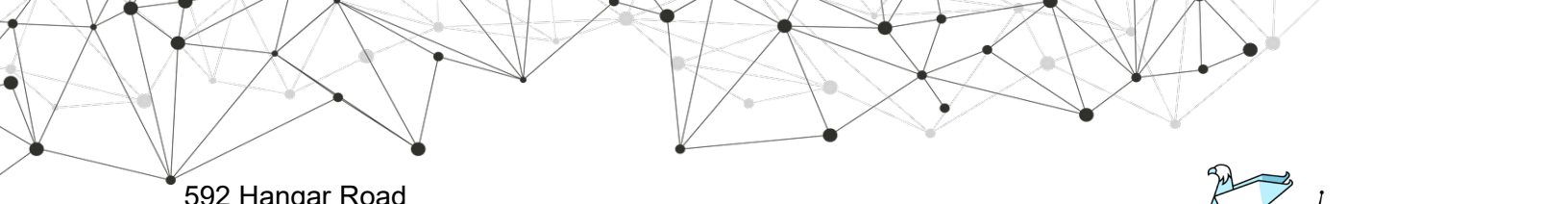
\$550,000 Awarded to Advance Air Force Command and Control Through Griffiss Institute's HUSTLE Defense Accelerator



HUSTLE Cohort 5 Team – AugSense – pictured with a ceremonial check for \$155,000 in funding. From left: Mayor Jeffery Lannigan, City of Rome; Ms. Heather Hage, President and CEO, Griffiss Institute; Mr. Bryce Randle, Co-Founder and CEO, AugSense; Mr. Anant Singh, Co-Founder and President, AugSense; and Dr. Sarah Muccio, Technical Advisor for Strategic Planning and Integration, Air Force Research Laboratory Information and Spectrum Warfare Directorate. Photo courtesy of Griffiss Institute Media.

ROME, N.Y. — May 1, 2026 — Griffiss Institute (GI) awarded \$550,000 in innovation funding on April 30, 2026 during its HUSTLE Defense Accelerator Pitch Day hosted at the Innovare Advancement Center, supporting startups developing next-generation capabilities for the U.S. Air Force's Command, Control, Communications, and Battle Management (C3BM) mission.

HUSTLE: Helping Upstate Science and Technology Leaders and Entrepreneurs is designed to connect early-stage dual-use technology companies with operational



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defense needs. Through direct collaboration with Air Force Research Laboratory Information and Spectrum Warfare Directorate (AFRL), the program provides founders with access to technical expertise, mission context, and pathways to transition technology into defense applications.

GI's HUSTLE Defense Accelerator is supported through funding from Empire State Development and National Grid, with additional support from AFRL.

“New York is uniquely positioned at the intersection of innovation and national security,” said Hope Knight, President, CEO, and Commissioner of Empire State Development. “By supporting programs like Griffiss Institute’s HUSTLE accelerator, we are helping emerging companies translate cutting-edge technologies into real-world applications while building a stronger, more resilient innovation economy across the state.”

The Cohort 5 accelerator focused on two priority areas identified by the Air Force:

- Artificial intelligence supporting human decision-making in command and control
- Command and control of AI-enabled autonomous systems

Five companies, selected from a national pool, completed the program:

[Archangel Response Corp. \(Syracuse, New York\)](#)

Develops AI systems to support decision-making in contested and communication-degraded environments.

[AugSense \(Aurora, Colorado\)](#)

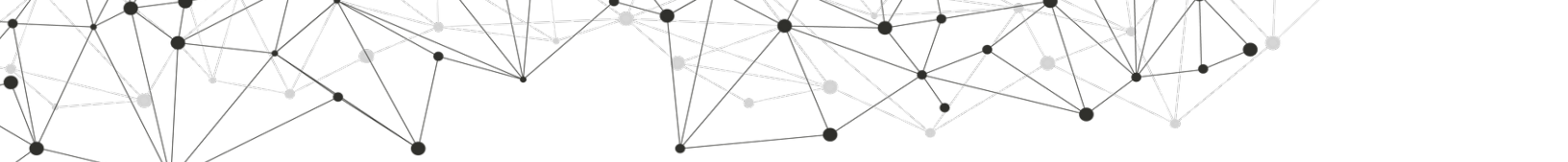
Builds AI-enabled sensor and edge computing platforms for real-time situational awareness.

[Full Spectrum Research \(Taberg, New York\)](#)

Designs secure, hardware-integrated AI systems for resilient command-and-control operations.

[QuantumAstra \(Frisco, Texas\)](#)

Develops compact quantum sensing technologies for defense and navigation applications.



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Vigilare AI (Syracuse, New York)

Creates AI-driven systems to support real-time drone operations and mission guidance.

During the program, companies worked directly with AFRL subject-matter experts while advancing customer discovery, refining technical applications, and preparing for defense acquisition pathways. The accelerator culminated in live pitch presentations evaluated by defense, industry, and investment stakeholders.

“Accelerating the transition of emerging technologies into operational capability is critical to maintaining our nation’s advantage,” said Dr. Michael Hayduk, Deputy Director of the Air Force Research Laboratory Information and Spectrum Warfare Directorate in Rome, NY. “Programs like HUSTLE strengthen the connection between innovators and the mission, enabling us to evaluate, refine, and advance technologies that directly support the warfighter.”

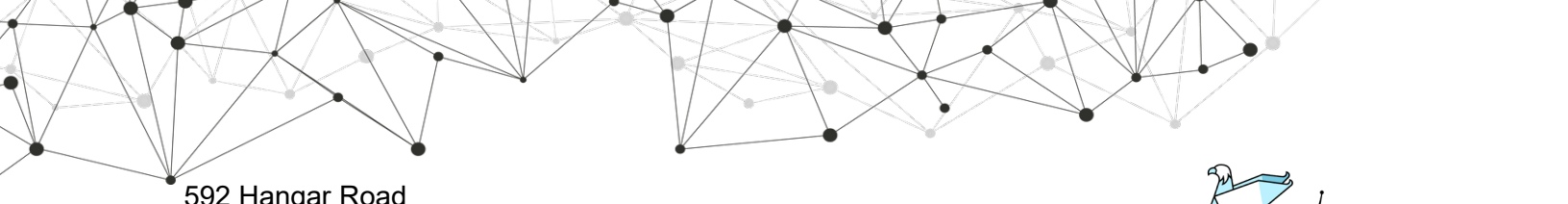
Funding awards were distributed to participating companies following a technical evaluation and pitch review.

As part of the program, participating companies commit to establishing a presence in New York State for at least one year, thereby reinforcing regional economic development and strengthening the Mohawk Valley’s role in national defense innovation.

“HUSTLE accelerates more than companies; it accelerates capability,” said Seth Mulligan, Chief Ventures Officer at Griffiss Institute. “By connecting founders directly with AFRL and mission partners, we are advancing technologies that matter to the mission and positioning them for real-world impact.”

Since its launch in 2022, HUSTLE has supported 37 startups, with several companies establishing operations in Rome, New York, and others gaining national and international recognition, including participation in [NATO’s DIANA program](#).

Companies will continue working with AFRL and regional partners to mature their technologies and pursue Department of War opportunities following the accelerator.



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Funding Awards

Following live pitch presentations and technical evaluation, awards were distributed as follows:

AugSense (Aurora, Colorado): \$155,000

Vigilare AI (Syracuse, New York): \$150,000

QuantumAstra (Frisco, Texas): \$125,000

Archangel Response Corp. (Syracuse, New York): \$75,000

Full Spectrum Research (Taberg, New York): \$45,000

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About Griffiss Institute

Griffiss Institute is a 501c3 not for profit organization based in Rome, NY, accelerating national security innovation through its three-pillar mission of Talent, Technology, and Venture Development. As the steward of the Innovare Advancement Center, an open, unclassified research and collaboration campus, Griffiss Institute fosters and drives partnerships across government, industry, and academia to advance dual-use technologies. Griffiss Institute is committed to strengthening national security through nontraditional STEM education, accelerated innovation, and the commercialization of emerging technologies, with a deep belief in American-made solutions, and the development of a resilient U.S. science and engineering workforce.

About AFRL

The Air Force Research Laboratory (AFRL) is the Department of the Air Force's primary scientific research and development center and one of six centers within Air Force Materiel Command. AFRL plays an integral role in leading the discovery, development and integration of affordable warfighting technologies for our air, space and cyberspace forces. With a workforce spanning across nine technology areas and 40 other operations around the globe, AFRL provides a diverse portfolio of science and technology ranging from fundamental to advanced research and technology development.

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