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ICYMI: Pure Lansing : LEAP Advances To Next Phase Of \$3.5 Million Grant To Boost Entrepreneurship In The Tri-County Region

Pure Lansing
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Grant will historically 'supercharge' the Lansing three-county region's business startup efforts

Lansing, Mich. (Nov. 9, 2023) — The Lansing Economic Area Partnership (LEAP), in collaboration with the Lansing Regional SmartZone LDFA Board, has achieved a significant milestone by progressing to the next phase of a \$3.5 million grant, dedicated to supporting entrepreneurship across the rural and urban Lansing three-county region.



The application for the Small Business Support Hubs grant program, which provides funding to entrepreneurship hubs across Michigan, was led by LEAP and the Lansing Regional SmartZone LDFA Board. This funding was made possible through the enactment of the \$75 million Small Business Smart Zones and Business Accelerators initiative, a one-time appropriation utilizing American Rescue Plan Act ("ARPA") funds. The goal is to create and operate programs that support small businesses disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.



Bob Trezise, president and CEO of the Lansing Economic Area Partnership (LEAP) (left) said, "LEAP, with our critical partners, have secured a historic level of entrepreneurial support for our growing startup ecosystem throughout the Lansing three-county region. The team approach to economic development always prevails, and we could not thank Governor Gretchen Whitmer and the Michigan Economic Development Corporation enough."

Partners are enthusiastic about this opportunity, with **Joseph Enerson, executive director for the Allen Neighborhood Center**, adding, "This grant is a testament to the strong commitment of our region to supercharge our support of small businesses."

"Having walked the entrepreneurial path myself, I understand the challenges and opportunities that come with building something from the ground up. Initiatives like this grant led by LEAP and the SmartZone provide crucial support, paving the way for the next generation of successful entrepreneurs throughout our region." **Jason Denovich, owner of new look computer and data and president of St. Johns Chamber of Commerce**.

Over the past decade, LEAP has been a steadfast supporter of over 5,000 small businesses and entrepreneurs throughout the region. LEAP has a proven track record of assisting both rural and urban communities through its partnerships with organizations across the region and this funding will help supercharge those efforts. LEAP's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion within the entrepreneurial community has been a strengthening component of the region's overall robust economy.

To achieve regional objectives around equitable entrepreneurship, LEAP has formed and managed the Regional Innovation Networking Group (RING), a network of over a dozen entrepreneurial support organizations that serve the local ecosystem. Members of this group, along with partners from across the region, joined forces with LEAP to prepare the grant application, resulting in the formation of the Tri-County Resource for Entrepreneurs and Knowledge Hub (TREK Hub).

The objectives of the TREK Hub align with the Small Business Support Hubs grant, aiming to bring new and more comprehensive resources to small businesses across the region. This includes funding for hub operations, programming, and direct support to small businesses that have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The program's goals, as defined by the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC), are to:

- Support small businesses disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.
 - Foster a more inclusive, accessible, and integrated tech and small business entrepreneurial ecosystem.
 - Increase the number of businesses served through new programming, technical assistance, and support services.
- Raise awareness of Michigan's small business ecosystem.
- Extend the geographic reach of network partners into underserved communities and rural areas.
- Enhance the national profile of Michigan's small business ecosystem.

Partners involved in the TREK Hub represent a diverse array of offerings in the entrepreneurial ecosystem, including organizations such as Allen Neighborhood Center - Incubator Kitchen, Bold Growth, Capital Region Small Business Development Center, Downtown Lansing Inc (DLI), Melanated Business Alliance, Michigan State University Burgess Institute for Entrepreneurship & Innovation, Michigan State University Multicultural Business Programs, Michigan State University Research Foundation, The Fledge, and Transformation GEMS.

The next phase will involve working closely with the TREK Hub partners to further refine the mission and scope of the programming. This collaborative effort ensures that shared resources are maximized, and gaps are addressed. **Harrison Leffel-Jones, executive director for the Lansing Regional SmartZone**, commented, "Receiving this grant is a testament to our regional partners' dedication and hard work. It's also an opportunity to bridge the gaps between our existing programs and communities of entrepreneurs to create more opportunities for collisions and collaborations between main street and high-tech businesses in our region."

Laurie Lonsdorf, regional director of the Capital Region Michigan Small Business Development Center - Lansing Community College, added, "Getting this grant is a significant milestone for our community. Having a three-year runway of additional support dollars will enable us to do even more and expand our outreach to underserved communities."

"Small businesses and entrepreneurs are the backbone of our community. They are the people, and their businesses are the places, that make our downtown districts and neighborhoods special. The TREK Hub for our region led by LEAP reflects our community's dedication to creating an environment where entrepreneurs can flourish, contribute to our local economy, and make a lasting impact," said **Cathleen Edgerly, executive director of Downtown Lansing Inc**.

Michigan and the Lansing Region have been consistently recognized on the national stage for their proactive and innovative efforts in supporting small business opportunities and resources. In the past two years, the Lansing Regional SmartZone has deployed over \$500,000 to support entrepreneurial programs. LEAP, in partnership with the MSU Research Foundation and VentureWell, has invested over \$1 million into innovation programming focused on medical and health innovations in the region. For updates and announcements visit purelansing.com/news.

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