

Ann Arbor / 11/15/2023

# Ann Arbor SPARK And Partners Receive Maximum Grant Award

by Special to Discover Communities



Governor Gretchen Whitmer joined the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) on Nov. 9 to announce that 27 organizations, including Ann Arbor SPARK, have been selected to serve as entrepreneurial hubs across the state of Michigan, providing comprehensive resources and support to the state's small businesses.

Ann Arbor SPARK is proud to partner with the [Greater Washtenaw Region MI-SBDC](#), [Howell Chamber of Commerce](#), [Jewish Family Services](#), [Launch 734 from Monroe County Business Alliance](#), the [Uplift Michigan™ Business Development Program from Michigan SBDC](#), and the [Washtenaw Community College Entrepreneurship Center](#), to grow the services and resources available to small business owners.



"We have a proven history of supporting high-growth entrepreneurs in the greater Ann Arbor area," stated Paul Krutko, president and CEO of Ann Arbor SPARK. "We're excited to build on that foundation, as well as the recent success of the Washtenaw County program, Advance Your Business, to serve small businesses and use this grant to create innumerable long-term benefits within the communities SPARK and our partners serve."

Ann Arbor SPARK will provide centralized administration of the grant, enabling strategic partners to focus on the rapid deployment of programming and services. Kristine Nash-Wong, the director of entrepreneurial services at the SPARK East Innovation Center in Ypsilanti will lead the effort.

According to Nash-Wong, "SPARK collaborated with our strategic partners to create detailed tactics and programming that provides a clear path to meaningful resources for small businesses; ensures equitable access; and builds collaborative, sustainable partnerships with community providers."

Ann Arbor SPARK and its partners received a maximum award of \$3 million from the Small Business Support Hubs program.

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The Small Business Support Hubs (SBSH) program [received approval](#) by the Michigan Strategic Fund in June, following the passage of the \$75 million Small Business Smart Zones and Business Accelerators initiative by the Michigan legislature in February. The program is funded by a one-time appropriation using American Rescue Plan Act ("ARPA") dollars to create and operate programs to support small businesses disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.

"Small businesses are the backbone of Michigan's economy, and this investment to support their growth from President Biden's American Rescue Plan will build on Michigan's economic momentum," said Governor Whitmer. "These 27 entrepreneurial hubs across the state will shore up our small business ecosystem, providing economically disadvantaged entrepreneurs and small businesses with the support they need to keep growing and expanding right here in Michigan."

The program generated a high level of interest and demand, with a Joint Evaluation Committee reviewing over 80 applications representing a total of \$275 million in funding requested. The 27 organizations selected will receive an average grant size of \$2.7 million. While state law requires 20-percent of the businesses served by SBSH program to be minority-owned, an average of over 50-percent minority-owned businesses will be served among the applications selected.

"Michigan is committed to bolstering our entrepreneurial ecosystem by supporting the small businesses that drive our economy, as well as the trusted and expert partner network that serve them, across the state," said Amy Rencher, MEDC Senior Vice President of Small Business Services. "By leveraging federal dollars, the Small Business Support Hubs will help us expand and improve resources across the state, as well as raise the national profile of the strength of our entrepreneurial community."

Programming across the 27 hubs is designed to meet regional needs as well as economic competitiveness measures, such as resources for strategic sectors including ClimateTech and Advanced Manufacturing. The hubs will also offer targeted support to family-owned and rural businesses to drive resiliency in a rapidly evolving economic climate.

Resources available from the hubs will include one-on-one coaching, cohort-based learning and accelerators, mentor matchmaking, pitch competitions, networking events, access to capital, partner referrals, and statewide resource navigation.

### Grantees by Region

- In **Region 1**, the grantees are Michigan Tech Enterprise Corporation (\$3,426,316), Lake Superior Community Partnership, Inc (\$3,426,315), and Chippewa County Economic Development Corporation (\$1,426,315).
- In **Region 2**, the grantee is Traverse City Center for Entrepreneurship (\$3,300,000).
- In **Region 3**, the grantees are Target Alpena Development Corporation (\$2,149,239) and Otsego County Economic Alliance, Inc (\$1,136,859).
- In **Region 4**, the grantees are Muskegon Innovation Hub at Grand Valley State University (\$1,796,721), Start Garden Inc (\$3,426,316), and Grand Rapids Nehemiah Project (\$2,426,316).
- In **Region 5**, the grantee is Central Michigan University Research Corporation (\$3,426,316).
- In **Region 6**, the grantees are Flint & Genesee Chamber Foundation (\$2,366,356) and Economic Development Alliance of St. Clair County (\$2,500,792).
- In **Region 7**, the grantee is Lansing Economic Area Partnership (\$3,426,316).
- In **Region 8**, the grantees are Battle Creek Unlimited, Inc (\$3,300,000) and Can-Do Kalamazoo dba Can-Do Kitchen (\$1,926,315).
- In **Region 9**, the grantees are Ann Arbor SPARK (\$3,426,316) and Lean Rocket Lab (\$1,400,000).
- In **Region 10**, the grantees are Operations School (\$2,815,115), Tejara (\$3,426,316), Detroit Economic Growth Association (\$3,426,316), Wayne State University Research and Technology Park in the City of Detroit (\$3,426,316) and Velocity SmartZone (\$1,800,000).

Multi-Region grantees are West Michigan Hispanic Chamber of Commerce (\$2,500,000) and ProsperUs Detroit Micro Lending (\$2,000,000), while state-wide grantees are Lawrence Technology University Centrepolis Accelerator (\$3,426,316), Small Business Association of Michigan Foundation (\$3,426,316), and Michigan Founders Fund (\$2,926,315).

Among the awardees for Region 1, [Lake Superior Community Partnership](#) has provided support to its business community in Marquette County for 25 years. With 95 percent of businesses in Marquette County classified as small businesses, the \$3 million in funding from the SBSH program will ensure they can continue to support the small business ecosystem in the U.P.

"We're honored to be awarded funds to expand those efforts by adding boots-on-the-ground support to reach small businesses in the entire central upper peninsula region, elevating our impact through more customized support and small business grants," said Lake Superior Community Partnership CEO Christopher Germain. "With a wide range of partners, including Innovate Marquette, Accelerate UP, Northern Michigan University, Keweenaw Bay Indian Community, Sault Tribe Inc., and SDBC Upper Peninsula, the next three years will further cement the region as a great place to start and grow a small business."

"The Upper Peninsula is a great place to live, raise a family, and work," said state Senator Ed McBroom (R-Waucedah Township). "These funds will help to make sure opportunities to work remain available. Our small businesses remain the foundation of our economy, and the MEDC support shows a commitment to fostering those opportunities. Ensuring future generations have the chance to remain here is great for the U.P. and the state of Michigan."

In Region 10 and also providing state-wide support, the [Lawrence Technology University Centrepolis Accelerator](#) also received a maximum award of \$3 million from the SBSH program. The Centrepolis Accelerator aims to fuel the growth of Southeast Michigan's small manufacturers and hardware entrepreneurs by providing access to key resources including mentors, workshops, cutting-edge technologies, corporate connections, student and faculty engagement, events, workspace, and a collaborative community of peers.

"The MEDC Small Business Hub award allows Centrepolis, Michigan's only dedicated hardtech physical product technology accelerator, to scale up our capabilities to help support entrepreneurs throughout the Upper and Lower Peninsula," said Dan Radomski, CEO of Centrepolis Accelerator. "With this funding, we will commercialize more physical products, advanced materials and manufacturing technologies, maintaining our state's leadership in this area and ensuring these products are designed, engineered, prototyped, and manufactured in Michigan."

The SBSH funding will also enable Centrepolis to launch a Defense Hardtech Accelerator to develop technologies critical to national security and address domestic supply chain gaps.

"It's an exciting time in Michigan, we're investing in businesses big and small," said state Representative Jason Hoskins (D-Southfield). "This is crucial infrastructure to truly compete for the best jobs and to strengthen small business and entrepreneurship in our communities. Not just in Southfield— but across the entire State, we're delivering."



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