FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

GOEDC Receives WEDC Grant to Launch Innovation Foundry Program

Strategic Partnership Advances Business Innovation and Regional Competitiveness

Oshkosh, Wis. – The Greater Oshkosh Economic Development Corporation (GOEDC), in collaboration with the UW-Oshkosh Center for Entrepreneurship and Economic Development (CEED) and the Small Business Development Center at UW-Oshkosh (SBDC at UWO), has secured Small Business Technical Assistance (SBTA) grant funding from the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) to implement the Innovation Foundry Program, a structured initiative designed to help established small businesses bring new ideas to market.

The Innovation Foundry will operate as an eight-week, cohort-based program offered four times over the next year. Each session will guide participating companies through a disciplined innovation process that includes opportunity framing, customer validation, financial modeling, operational planning, compliance considerations, and market strategy. Businesses will receive a blend of group workshops, mentorship, and individualized advising tailored to support product launches and service expansion efforts.

"We are proud to partner on The Innovation Foundry as the program fills a critical gap by providing established small businesses with structure, resources, and expert guidance to move new ideas from concept to market," said Tricia Rathermel, President & CEO of Greater Oshkosh Economic Development Corporation. "This program aligns with GOEDC's Future in Focus strategy to cultivate a Culture of Innovation for longer-term business growth and competitiveness. We are committed to supporting existing businesses as they create new opportunities for investment and job growth in Winnebago County."

This initiative is rooted in strategic partnership. GOEDC will lead program coordination and business engagement to ensure strong alignment with regional economic priorities, in collaboration with community partners including the Oshkosh Chamber of Commerce. CEED will provide innovation frameworks, research-driven tools, and entrepreneurial education expertise. The SBDC at UW–Oshkosh will deliver hands-on advising and technical assistance, reinforcing its ongoing commitment to small business growth across the region.

"This is another powerful example of responsive collaboration that leverages the scholarship, expertise and talent within UW Oshkosh for the direct benefit of our regional and state economy," said Frank Braun, dean of UW Oshkosh's College of Business, Arts and Communication. "By aligning our academic strengths with real-time business needs, we are not only accelerating innovation among established and emerging companies but also deepening the relevance and impact of our educational mission."

A distinctive component of the program is the integration of UW Oshkosh students as Student Innovation Associates. Students from multiple disciplines will work directly with participating firms

throughout the eight-week experience, offering dedicated project support while gaining applied, real-world consulting experience. This structure strengthens business outcomes while building meaningful connections between regional employers and emerging talent.

"What makes this initiative truly unique is the caliber and interdisciplinary nature of the student teams supporting these companies," said John Muraski, professor and director of the Center for Entrepreneurship and Economic Development (CEED) at UW Oshkosh. "Our students will serve as dedicated innovation partners for small businesses and startups—bringing AI-enabled research, analysis and creative problem-solving to the table. The investment in experiential learning delivers remarkable return on investment, generating measurable results for participating organizations while preparing students to lead in today's dynamic economy."

GOEDC's strategic planning process and commissioned research revealed a gap in resources for existing small businesses seeking to diversify or test new offerings. While early-stage startups have access to entry-level programming, established firms often lack a structured pathway to move ideas from concept to launch. Innovation Foundry is designed to address that gap without duplicating services already available in the community.

By delivering four cohorts annually, the program creates a steady pipeline of innovation-focused businesses positioned for measurable growth in revenue, job creation, and retention. Beyond direct business outcomes, the grant strengthens GOEDC, the Chamber, CEED, and SBDC's long-term ability to deliver specialized entrepreneurial programming, ensuring that innovation support remains embedded in the region well beyond the initial funding period.

Through this coordinated partnership between economic development and higher education, the Innovation Foundry Program represents a forward-looking investment in Winnebago County's resilience, competitiveness, and culture of innovation.

Businesses interested in learning more about the Innovation Foundry Program, including program details and participation opportunities, can visit Innovation Foundry - Center for Entrepreneurship and Economic Development University of Wisconsin–Oshkosh

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