



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Forward Festival Returns for 16th Year With Community-Led Programming

(MADISON, Wis.)—More than 50 events organized by entrepreneurs and partner organizations will take place during the 16th annual Forward Festival held Aug. 17-21, providing opportunities for entrepreneurs, innovators and business leaders to connect, learn and collaborate.

“Forward Festival continues to evolve alongside the entrepreneurial community,” Ross Larson, festival board member and software developer at Paradigm, said. “What makes the festival unique is that it’s built by the community, for the community. Every event offers an opportunity to learn something new, make meaningful connections and be inspired by all the innovation happening across Wisconsin.”

The 2026 event continues to expand with new programming, including experiential networking opportunities, from a sauna networking event on Aug. 17, to hands-on sessions covering government sales, building stronger client relationships, understanding Wisconsin’s growing organic food ecosystem and founder productivity. These events join the festival’s continued focus on trends, including artificial intelligence, with nine sessions exploring practical applications of AI, highlighted by the inaugural AI Summit on Aug. 21 at 100state.

Returning signature events include the Badger Startup Summit on Aug. 17, the Greater Madison Chamber of Commerce’s Pressure Chamber pitch competition event on Aug. 18 and the High Tech Happy Hour 25th Anniversary Celebration on Aug. 20 at the UW Memorial Union.

Attendees can choose from several pass options to fit different interests and levels of participation, including two new offerings this year.

- **Forward Visionary Pass (NEW):** The premium Forward Fest experience for supporters who want to help advance the festival’s mission while enjoying exclusive benefits, including access to all events, a name badge, Forward Fest shirt, Forward Festive Ale and a special surprise
- **All-Inclusive Forward Pass with Swag:** Includes access to all Forward Fest events, plus a name badge, Forward Fest shirt and Forward Festive Ale
- **All-Inclusive Forward Pass:** Provides access to all Forward Fest events without the additional merchandise
- **Free Events Forward Pass – Supported by a \$20 Contribution (NEW):** Offers access to all free Forward Fest events while allowing attendees to support the continued growth of the festival with a voluntary contribution
- **Free Events Forward Pass:** Provides access to all free Forward Fest events at no cost

- Single Event Tickets: Available for attendees who want to participate in individual Forward Fest events without purchasing a full pass

Ticket prices will increase for the All-Inclusive Forward Pass (without Swag) after Aug. 5. Once participants buy a Forward Pass, they can RSVP to events with one click and have events synced to their calendars.

Forward Festival is sponsored by Fine Point Consulting, Greater Madison Chamber of Commerce, M3 Insurance, Neider & Boucher, Swink, WEDC and the Wisconsin Union. Public relations support is provided by Revelation PR, Advertising & Social Media.

For a detailed listing of events happening during the Forward Festival, please visit www.forwardfest.org.

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