

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Southwest Michigan Awarded \$930,000 Michigan Strategic Fund Grant to Expand Entrepreneurial Support Across Seven Counties

Funding will strengthen regional Entrepreneur Support Organizations (ESOs) and expand access to coaching, capital readiness, mentorship and specialized business resources for entrepreneurs across Southwest Michigan.

KALAMAZOO, Mich. — Entrepreneurs and small businesses across Southwest Michigan will soon have greater access to the resources they need to launch, grow or scale thanks to a \$930,000 Small Business Support Hubs 2.0 grant awarded through the Michigan Economic Development Corporation's (MEDC) Michigan Strategic Fund.

As a regional convener, Southwest Michigan First will distribute the funding among its regional Entrepreneur Support Organizations (ESOs), expanding each partner's capacity to deliver high-quality business support throughout the seven-counties in Southwest Michigan. Together, these organizations will provide greater access to business coaching, technical assistance, mentorship, capital readiness, AI-powered tools and specialized programming designed to help entrepreneurs at every stage of their journey launch, grow or scale their businesses.

This investment builds on the success of the Southwest Michigan Entrepreneurship Hub, launched in 2025 through the MEDC's Trusted Connector grant program. The Hub created a centralized online network of trusted Entrepreneur Support Organizations and resources, strengthening the region's collaborative "no wrong front door" approach. Today, entrepreneurs can connect with the right expertise, services and business resources through one convenient entry point, making it easier to access the right expertise, services and connections at the right time.

The expanded network of support will especially benefit rural entrepreneurs, underrepresented founders and small businesses across Southwest Michigan's seven-county region while fostering innovation, strengthening local businesses, creating jobs and advancing long-term economic prosperity.

"Every entrepreneur deserves access to the tools, expertise and connections needed to succeed, regardless of where they live or where they are in their business journey," said Carla Sones, interim CEO of Southwest Michigan First. "This investment strengthens our entire regional network of Entrepreneur Support Organizations, allowing more founders to be reached, more small businesses to be supported and more opportunities to be created for innovation and economic growth throughout Southwest Michigan."

Southwest Michigan First will continue working alongside its regional Entrepreneur Support Organization partners to deliver expanded services and ensure entrepreneurs throughout Southwest Michigan have access to coordinated, high-quality support.

Regional Entrepreneur Support Organization partners include:

- Albion Economic Development Corporation
- Battle Creek Unlimited
- Can-Do Kalamazoo
- Cornerstone Alliance
- Emerge Innovation Hub
- Liminal Group
- Michigan Small Business Development Center Southwest Region
- Room 35
- South Haven Regional Business Hub
- Startup Zoo

Clarence Lloyd, vice president and Chamber director at Southwest Michigan First, says, "This region has always been fertile ground for entrepreneurial innovation. Companies and products born in Southwest Michigan have changed healthcare, transformed the music industry, and shaped the way people live every day." He adds, "While the support entrepreneurs need to succeed has long existed here, this community of partners remains committed to raising the level of visibility and collaboration around that support. Because of this investment, today's entrepreneurs can see themselves writing the next chapter of world-changing innovation right here in Southwest Michigan."

Entrepreneurs looking to launch, grow or scale a business are encouraged to connect with the Southwest Michigan Entrepreneurship Hub, where they can explore available resources and connect with trusted regional partners through one convenient online platform.

For more information about the Southwest Michigan Entrepreneurship Hub, visit <https://www.southwestmichiganfirst.com/services/hub>.

About Southwest Michigan First

Southwest Michigan First is a privately funded, 501(c)(3), community and economic development organization whose mission is to increase economic prosperity for all in Southwest Michigan. Founded in 1999 on the principle that *the greatest force for change is a job*, the organization works across all industries to advance economic, workforce and community development initiatives throughout the seven counties that make up the Southwest Michigan region.

Learn more at [southwestmichiganfirst.com](https://www.southwestmichiganfirst.com).

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