On Tuesday, July 23, U.S. Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross announced the grantees under EDA’s 2019 Regional Innovation Strategies (RIS) program competition.

This year, 26 i6 Challenge grantees were funded along with 18 Seed Fund Support recipients. The RIS portfolio represents a catalytic, nationwide program designed to fuel high-growth entrepreneurship and increase access to capital for communities across America.

The i6 Challenge aspires to increase productivity and accelerate growth through entrepreneurship that translates innovations, ideas, intellectual property, and applied research into new businesses, accelerated paths to export, increased foreign direct investment, and new jobs.

The 2019 RIS Notice of Funding Opportunity generated over 140 i6 Challenge applications to the program. The 26 selected award recipients represent a geographically diverse cohort spanning 19 states, with Minnesota as a new addition to the RIS portfolio. In total, the 2019 i6 Challenge cohort generated $20.2 million in matching funds from a variety of private and public sector stakeholders, with $17.5 million in EDA funds to support programmatic efforts of the projects.

Knowing that innovation is a key driver in economic advancement, there was increased emphasis on growing innovation-driven industries of the future, to include the advancement of the commercial space economy and the integration of smart technology to enhance regional infrastructure in cities and airports. For example, the Maui Economic Development Board is launching a space-focused career pathway...
A common theme among this year’s cohort was the emphasis on bridging the urban-rural divide in entrepreneurial opportunity. To that end, Eastern Shore Entrepreneurship Center is bringing rural and urban cohorts together to address challenges in agriculture, aquaculture, and the environment across Eastern and Southern Maryland. Marquette Tech District Foundation is expanding their current model of a tech district into the Rural Delta Tech Innovation Network (RDTIN) that will support rural communities throughout the Delta region by cross-pollinating programs in Missouri and Kentucky. In Tennessee, AgLaunch is leveraging a multi-state, multi-institution initiative to create platforms to commercialize technologies in agricultural technology, facilitate farmer transitions into next generation agricultural opportunities, and forge farms of the future.

Strengthening America’s manufacturing base through technology development and deployment is core to the mission of several i6 Challenge award recipients, including Purdue University’s initiative to drive next-generation advanced manufacturing technology and develop an innovation economy workforce in central Indiana. Austin Community College is launching a manufacturing and prototyping lab facility and business incubator to accelerate Central Texas’ manufacturing economy and drive increased physical product innovation.

Several 2019 i6 Challenge recipients are on the cutting edge of a rapidly evolving healthcare environment. The University of Nebraska is building a medical technology pipeline in Omaha to prototype, validate, and commercialize new medical devices through life-saving entrepreneurial opportunities. University of California Los Angeles is supporting aspiring clinical and technical entrepreneurs to bridge the gap between medicine and technology to advance patient care at their Biodesign Hub. On the East Coast, the Mayo Clinic in Jacksonville, Florida is building a community of innovators to develop new healthcare and life science products.

EDA is excited to invest in these organizations as they continue to build regional capacity for innovation and entrepreneurship and enhance job creation in their communities.
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