

# Libraries Supporting Small Business

*Building Partnerships for Local  
Economic Development*



MILWAUKEE  
PUBLIC LIBRARY

Inspiration **Starts Here**

**WISCONSIN**  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

## Goals

Strengthen library  
services that help  
entrepreneurs &  
small businesses

**01** Learn about  
WEDC

**02** Explore partnership  
opportunities

**03** See example partnership  
and program models

**04** Make your own business  
support plan



# WEDC – Wisconsin Libraries

October 28, 2026

# ***MISSION***

**WEDC's mission** is to strategically invest in Wisconsin to enhance the economic well-being of people and their businesses and communities.

# ***VISION***

WEDC's vision is an Economy for All, where every Wisconsinite has the opportunity to thrive.

***CREATING AN  
ECONOMY FOR ALL,  
WHERE EVERY WISCONSINITE HAS  
THE OPPORTUNITY TO THRIVE***



# Diverse Business Development

## Diverse Businesses Defined

This program is intended to support businesses and entrepreneurs from underserved communities, including, but not limited to, individuals who are economically or socially disadvantaged. These are individuals whose ability to compete in the free enterprise system has been limited by reduced access to capital, credit, and business opportunities compared with those who are not economically or socially disadvantaged.

The program seeks to expand access to resources, opportunities, and business development support for diverse businesses throughout Wisconsin, helping to foster equitable economic growth and participation in the marketplace.

## DBD's Vision

To foster a thriving and inclusive Wisconsin economy where all businesses and entrepreneurs, regardless of background or circumstance, have equitable access to the resources, opportunities, and support needed to compete, grow, and succeed in an evolving global marketplace.

## DBD Mission

The mission of the Diverse Business Development (DBD) Program is to strengthen Wisconsin's underserved and disadvantaged business communities by expanding access to resources, capital, networks, and growth opportunities. Through strategic partnerships, capacity building, advocacy, and technical assistance, DBD empowers organizations and entrepreneurs to overcome barriers, build sustainable businesses, and contribute to equitable economic growth across the state.

# DBD Program Goal and Description

## Program Goals

The Diverse Business Development (DBD) Program supports the creation, growth, and expansion of Wisconsin businesses by increasing access to capital, business development resources, technical assistance, and strategic growth opportunities for businesses operating in historically unserved and underserved markets.

## Program Description

The DBD Program provides funding and support through nonprofit organizations across Wisconsin to help entrepreneurs and small businesses overcome barriers to growth and competitiveness. The program focuses on expanding access to financing, business development services, training, mentorship, and market opportunities for businesses that have traditionally faced challenges accessing these resources.

Program investments are intended to:

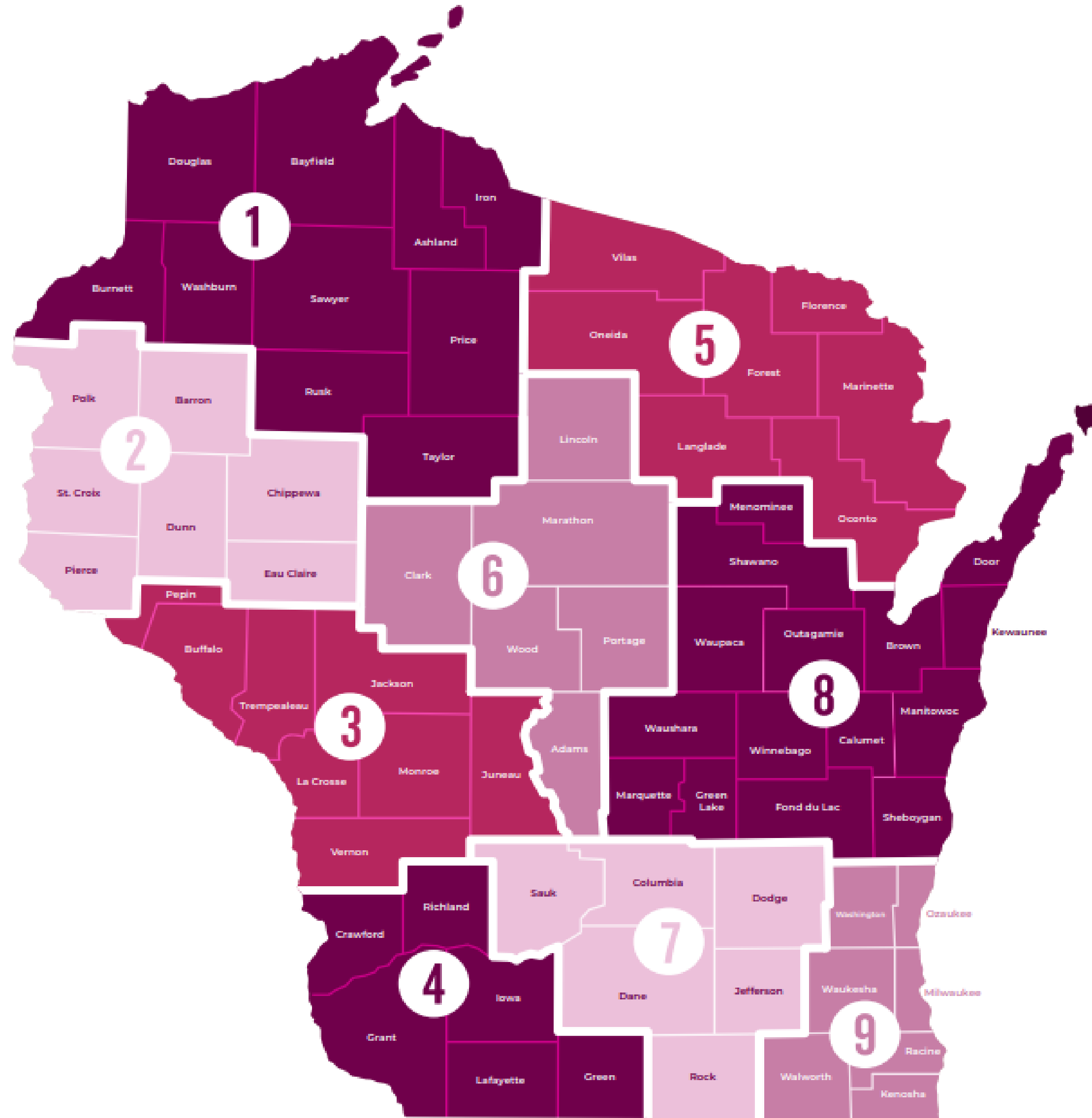
- Strengthen businesses in underserved communities and markets
- Increase access to capital and financial resources
- Support business retention, expansion, and job creation
- Enhance entrepreneurial capacity through training and technical assistance
- Foster long-term economic growth and community development throughout Wisconsin

# Diverse Business Development

## Program Focus

1. Management and maintenance of grants
  - Key Strategic Partnership
  - Small Business Technical Assistance
  - Diverse Business Development
  - Capacity Building
2. Quality technical assistance and professional development
  - Development Forums, Resources, and Informational Sessions
  - Growth of the Technical Service Ecosystem: New Partners
3. Access to business opportunities, capital through Activities and Events
  - The Lt. Governor's Small Business Academy
  - Business Opportunity, Informational Sessions, and Roundtables
  - Marketplace: The Governor's Business Conference

# DBD Team Regional Coverage Map



- **Francisca Rodriguez- 1,2 3**
- **Seyoum Mengesha- 4,5,6**
- **Nichol Crust- 7,8**
- **All DBD - 9**

# Grants

## **Key Strategic Partnership (KSP)**

This program prioritizes collaboration with organizations that have demonstrated impact and reach within underserved communities. These partnerships are leveraged to amplify resources, share expertise, and coordinate efforts that drive systemic change in business development and economic equity.

## **Small Business Technical Assistance (SBTA)**

Grant funding is provided to not-for-profit entities that operate technical assistance programs for traditional small businesses. These funds support direct operational expenses for specific projects or initiatives and may also be used to participate in and develop technical assistance programs to ensure high-quality guidance, mentorship, and support tailored to the unique needs of small businesses.

## **Disadvantaged Business Development Grants and Support Program**

Our grants and Support Program is designed to foster inclusive economic growth by promoting investment in new partnerships or existing relationships through initiatives that support and advance business development, job retention, and job creation in underserved markets. The program aims to increase access to capital, business development resources, and training opportunities for underserved entrepreneurs and small businesses.

# Development and Support Offerings

**Diverse Small Business Development Roundtables** in Wisconsin are collaborative forums often held as part of broader initiatives, such as the **MARKETPLACE Wisconsin Conference**, organized by the DBD Team.

- These roundtables are designed to invite market partners to support and empower small businesses owned by individuals from underrepresented communities, including Black, Latino, Indigenous, Asian American, women, veterans, LGBTQ+ individuals, and entrepreneurs with disabilities.

**Innovation & Impact Forum:** Strengthening Wisconsin's Entrepreneurial Ecosystem is an interactive event designed to foster relationships among small-business technical service providers, regional economic leaders, and WEDC staff to strengthen Wisconsin's entrepreneurial ecosystem.

- Build Connections: Create networking, share knowledge, highlight WEDC programs, and encourage collaboration opportunities for organizational leaders and local stakeholders to help drive economic growth.
- Provide a platform to deliver important organizational development opportunities through speakers, presentations, and informational sessions.

# Development and Support Offerings Cont.

## Business Opportunity Sessions

The session was designed to:

- Inform businesses about upcoming **design-build contracting opportunities**.
- Connect **diverse and disadvantaged business enterprises (DBEs)** with key stakeholders.
- Provide guidance on **certification, bonding, and capacity building**.
- Foster **regional collaboration** and inclusive economic growth.



## THE LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR'S SMALL BUSINESS ACADEMY



MARKETPLACE  
WISCONSIN

The Governor's Marketplace Conference

**REGISTRATION OPEN**

**DEC. 8-10, 2026**

**WISCONSIN**  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The image shows a promotional graphic for the Marketplace Wisconsin conference. It features a photograph of three people at a table, with a white outline of Wisconsin overlaid on a purple background. The text includes the event name, dates, and the Wisconsin Economic Development logo.

Marketplace  
Registration:  
<https://wedc.eventsair.com/2026-marketplace/mp26-reg/Site/Register>

## Diverse Business Development Annual Events

## **Eugene Manzanet, Ph.D.**

**Senior Director, Diverse Business Development**

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## **Nichole Crust**

**Director, Entrepreneurship Access & Inclusion**

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## **Francisca Rodriguez**

**Senior Manager, Diverse Business Development**

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## **Seyoum Mengesha**

**Director, Diverse Business Development**

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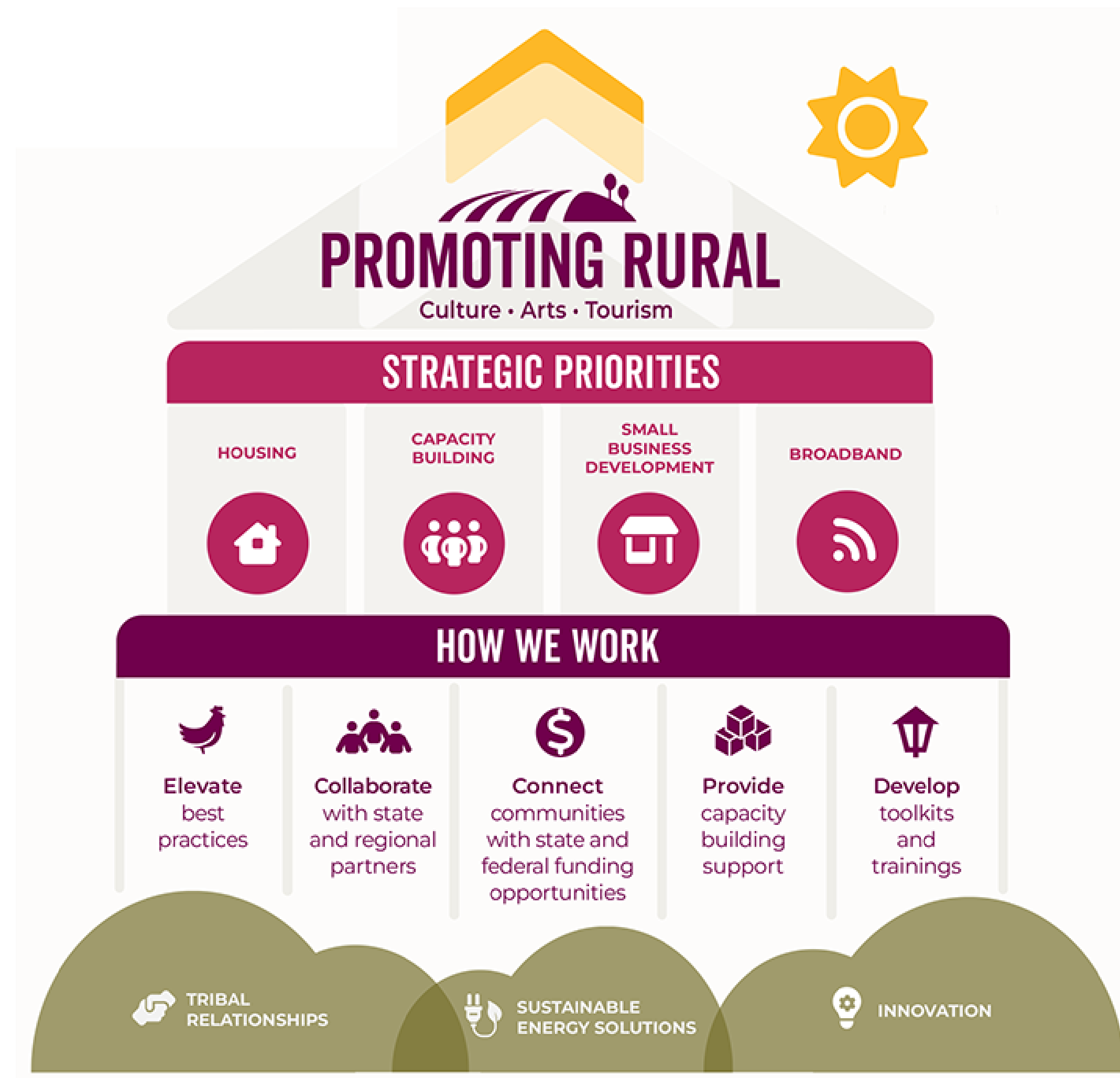
608.210.6880



# **Thank you!**

# Office Rural Prosperity

# Office of Rural Prosperity Strategic Priorities



## Mission:

Foster vibrant, prosperous and resilient rural communities across Wisconsin.

## Vision:

The Office provides a one-stop shop to help rural stakeholders navigate programs and resources serving rural communities and businesses.

**RURALWI.COM**

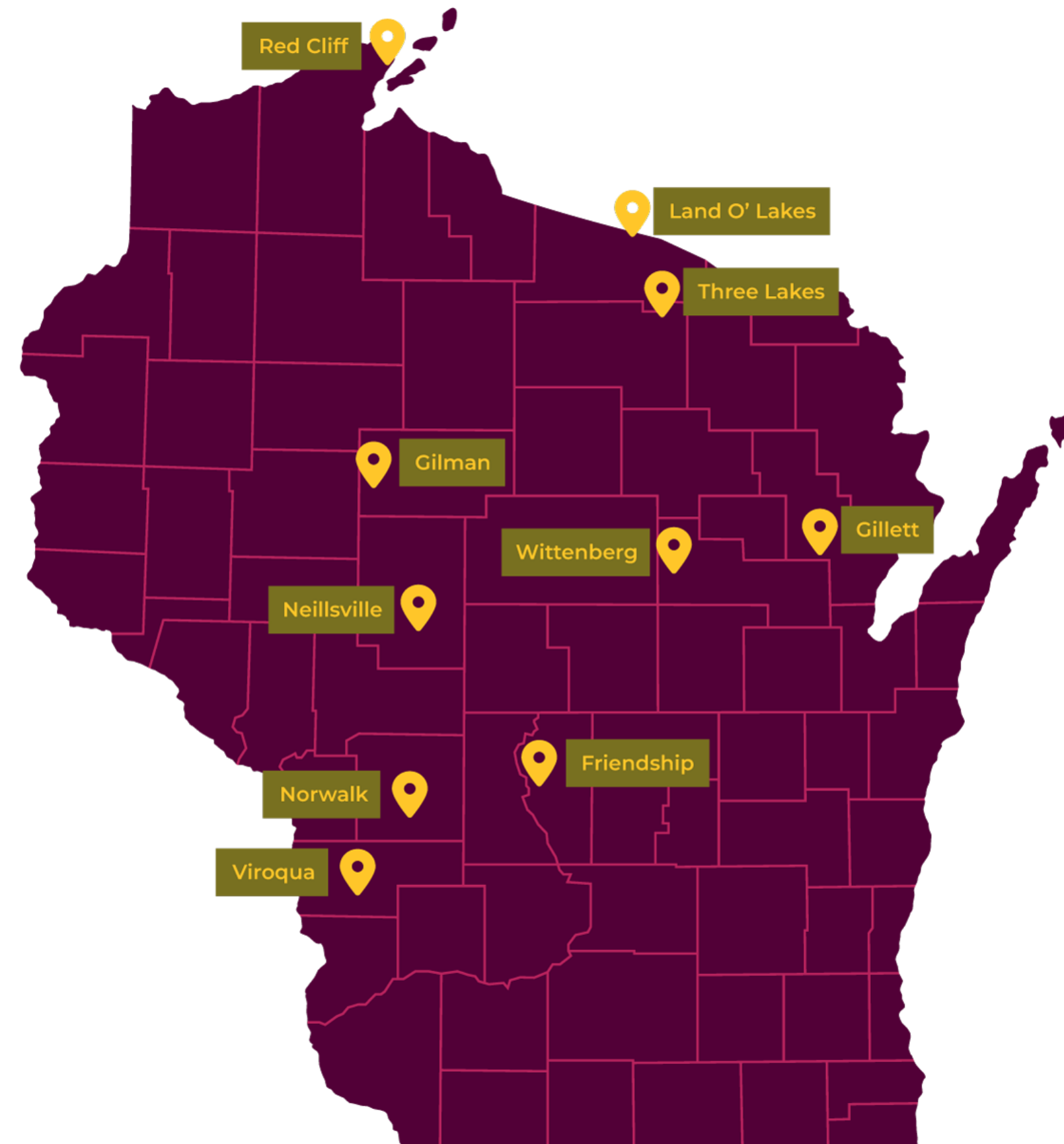
# ORP Technical Support Examples

- **Grant & Resource Database**
- **Communities of Practice**
  - Rural Housing
  - Creative Industries
- **Webinars**
- **Toolkits**



# Thrive Rural Wisconsin

## Building Sustainable Economic Vitality



### Cohort 2 Locations

- ORP provides project management, financial support and technical assistance
- Intended for rural and tribal communities to bring together local leadership, set common goals and access resources that will help them take action on those goals.
- Leverages state and federal funding

Each Cohort includes **10** selected communities

# Thrive Rural Wisconsin

## Priority Areas



### Thrive Rural Wisconsin priority areas:

- Community-based economic development
- Small business development
- Rural housing
- Community facilities
- Sustainable energy projects
- Organizational and financial management

Each Cohort includes **10** selected communities

# Tribal Relations

- WEDC'S ORP Staff includes a Tribal Liaison position that partners with Tribes across the state on their economic development priorities by:
  - Building working day-to-day relationships with Tribal leaders, nations and economic development partners
  - Acting as an initial point of contact for Tribal partners and citizens
  - Leading projects to further engage Tribal Nations
- WEDC also supports Tribal Community Development Financial Institutions.



# Organizing Developer Tours Guide

- Attracting developers has been identified as a major roadblock for rural communities
- The Organizing Developer Tours guide highlights what is working in rural Wisconsin
- Step by step guidance on how to plan a developer tour with templates and examples of materials developers are looking for to invest in a community



Scan with your phone's camera app to view and download this resource



# Housing Toolkit

- Housing is crucial for the economic well-being of all Wisconsin communities. Availability of affordable workforce is crucial for rural Wisconsin.
- The Rural Housing Toolkit guide highlights key components and strategies of housing development.
- Breaks down the "Who's Who" of rural housing, financing tools, and provides innovative ideas for addressing housing issues.

Scan with your phone's camera app to view this resource



# Broadband Toolkit for Rural Economic Development

In rural areas, **80% broadband adoption** can lead to a **213% increase in business growth**, making it a game-changer for economic development.

Broadband supports:

- Education
- Health care
- Business & economic growth



**Access the toolkit  
today and get your  
community connected!**  
[ruralwi.com/broadband](http://ruralwi.com/broadband)

# Emerging Developer Fellowship Program

-  Building rural expertise in housing development
-  Supporting network development of emerging developers
-  Learning with partners across Wisconsin to advance local housing initiatives



**Everett Black**

**Location**

Southwest Wisconsin

Host Organization: Southwest  
Regional Planning Commission



**Tashyanna Mixson**

**Location**

City of Washburn

Host Organization: Bayfield  
County



**Mark Lee**

**Location**

Door County

Host Organization:  
NeighborWorks Green Bay

# LEARN MORE @ [RURALWI.COM](https://ruralwi.com)

## ► Find:

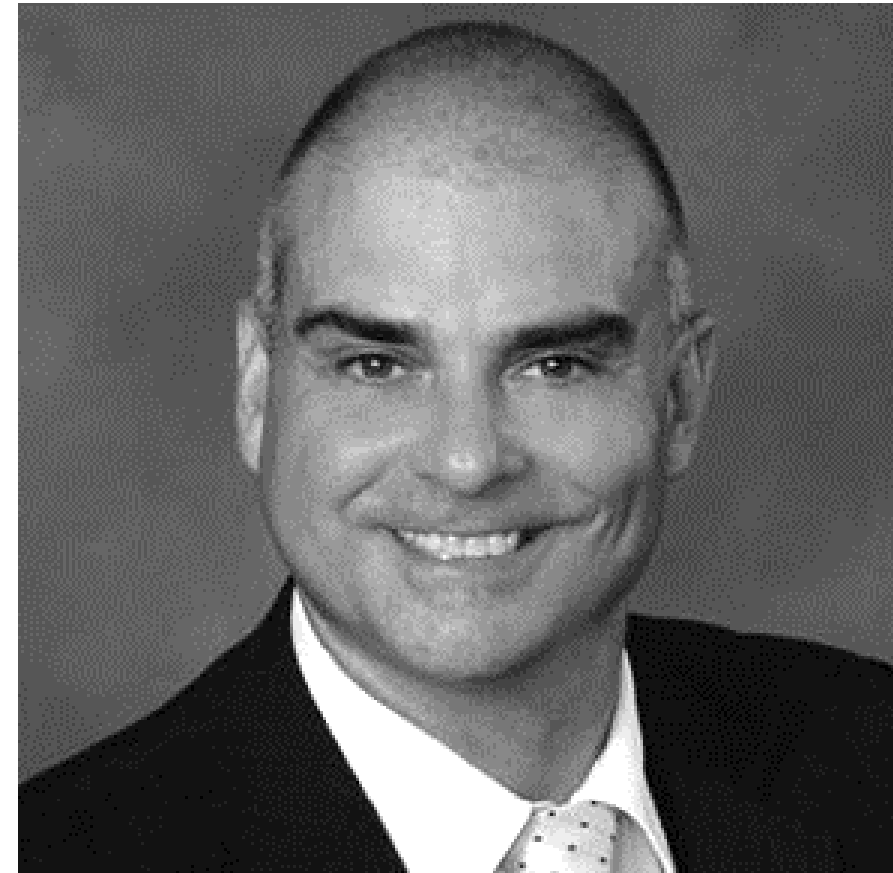
- Resources and Grants For Rural Communities
- Success Stories in Rural Communities
- Deep Dives into our Strategic Priorities
- Rural Economic Development News



# Office of Rural Prosperity Staff



**Beth Haskovec**  
Director



**James Cleveland**  
Rural Development  
Specialist



**Kietra Olson**  
Rural Initiatives  
Senior Manager



**Corrie Beula Kovacs**  
Rural Development  
Senior Coordinator



**Rachel Rushmann**  
Rural Initiatives  
Senior Manager



**Kelly Traczyk**  
Rural Sustainability  
Specialist



**Sanjana Srinivas**  
Office of Rural  
Prosperity Intern

# Regional Economic Development

# Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation



## Business & Community Development

- [Downtown Development](#)
- [Business Investment & Attraction](#)
- [Regional Economic Development Directors](#)



## [Entrepreneurship & Innovation](#)



## [Global Trade & Investment](#)

# Supporting Community Development

## Financial Assistance

- Capacity Building Grant
  - Cooperative Development Grant
- CDI- Vibrant Spaces Grant
- Ignite WI
- Opportunity Attraction Fund
- Talent Recruitment Grant



# Supporting Community Development

## Technical Assistance

### ➤ Main Street/Connect Communities

- Webinars
- Workshops
- Grant contests



# Supporting Small Business

## Access to Capital

- Small Business Development Grant
- Kiva Loan Matching

## Ecosystem

- SizeUpWI



# Supporting Real Estate Development

## Financial Assistance

- Site Assessment & Brownfield Clean Up Grants
- Community Development Investment Grant
- Idle Sites Redevelopment Grant
- Historic Preservation Tax Credits
- Industrial Revenue Bonds

## Technical Assistance

- Locate in Wisconsin
- Certified Sites Program



# Supporting Business Attraction and Growth

## Financial Assistance

- Business Development Tax Credit & Enterprise Zone Tax Credit
- Qualified New Business Venture Tax Credit, Technology Development Loan & Wisconsin Investment Fund
- International Market Access Grant

## Technical Assistance

- Global Trade Missions



The map shows the following counties and their approximate locations relative to the numbered regions:

- Region 1:** Douglas, Bayfield, Iron, Ashland.
- Region 2:** Burnett, Washburn, Sawyer, Polk, Barron, St. Croix, Dunn, Pierce.
- Region 3:** Rusk, Price, Taylor, Chippewa, Eau Claire, Pepin, Buffalo, Trempealeau, Jackson, La Crosse, Monroe, Vernon.
- Region 4:** Crawford, Richland, Grant, Iowa, Lafayette, Green.
- Region 5:** Vilas, Oneida, Florence, Forest, Marinette, Langlade, Oconto, Menominee, Shawano.
- Region 6:** Lincoln, Marathon, Clark, Wood, Portage.
- Region 7:** Adams, Waushara, Waubesa, Outagamie, Brown, Kewaunee, Manitowish, Calumet, Sheboygan, Fond du Lac, Winnebago, Marquette, Green Lake, Dodge, Columbia, Sauk, Dane, Jefferson, Waukesha, Racine, Kenosha, Walworth, Rock.
- Region 8:** Door, Kewaunee, Manitowish, Calumet, Sheboygan, Fond du Lac, Winnebago, Marquette, Green Lake, Dodge, Columbia, Sauk, Dane, Jefferson, Waukesha, Racine, Kenosha, Walworth, Rock.
- Region 9:** Dodge, Columbia, Sauk, Dane, Jefferson, Waukesha, Racine, Kenosha, Walworth, Rock.

**► Tina Chitwood**  
Senior Economic Development  
Director  
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To see what makes Wisconsin a great state to live, work and play, visit **[lookforwardwisconsin.com](http://lookforwardwisconsin.com)**

To see how WEDC can assist businesses and communities grow and site selectors in meeting their clients' needs, visit **[wedc.org](http://wedc.org)**

For general information on programs and available resources, visit **[wedc.org/programs](http://wedc.org/programs)**

Websites: **[lookforwardwisconsin.com](http://lookforwardwisconsin.com)** and **[wedc.org](http://wedc.org)**  
Newsletters: **[wedc.org/newsletter-sign-up](http://wedc.org/newsletter-sign-up)**



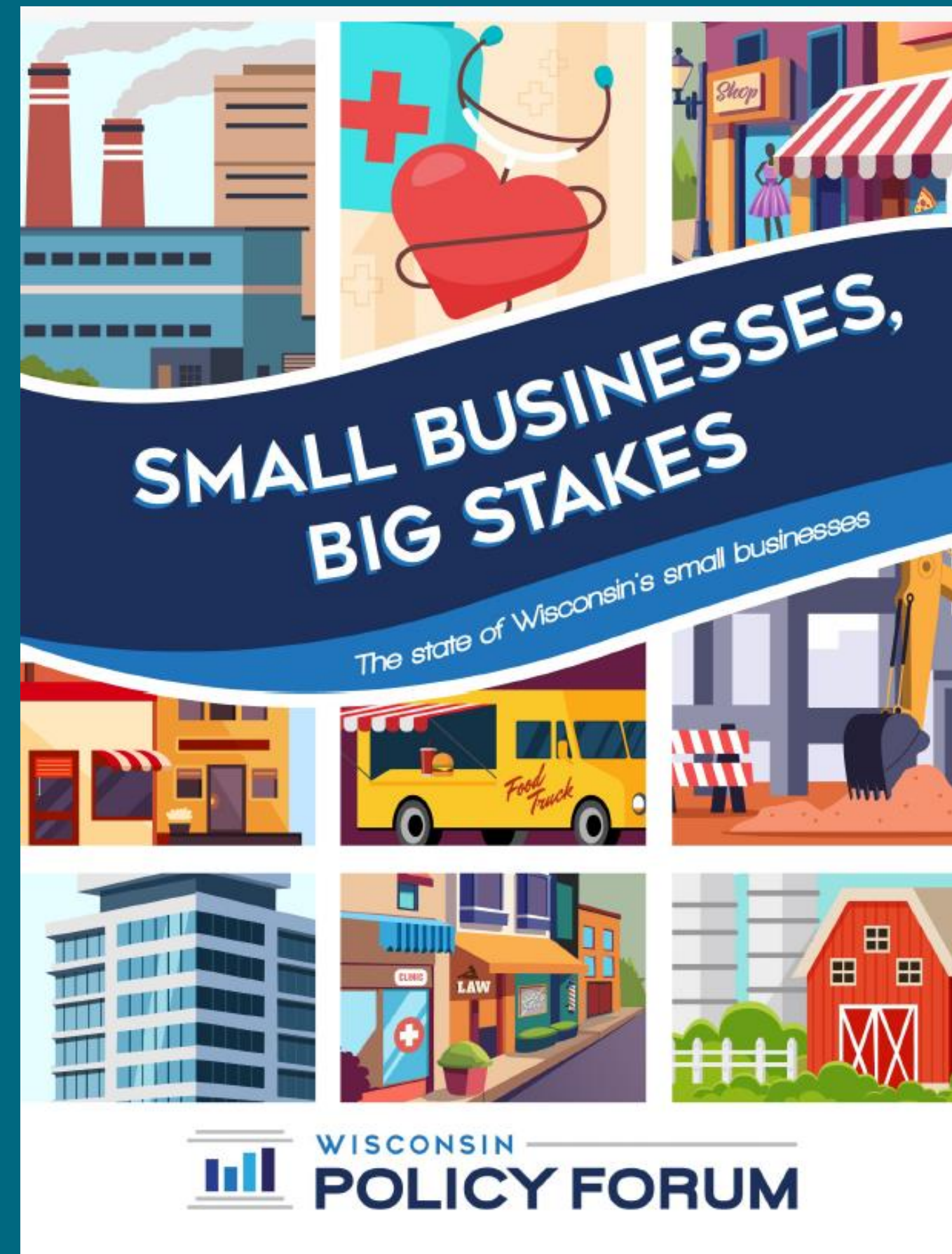


**THANK YOU**

# Libraries Supporting Small Business

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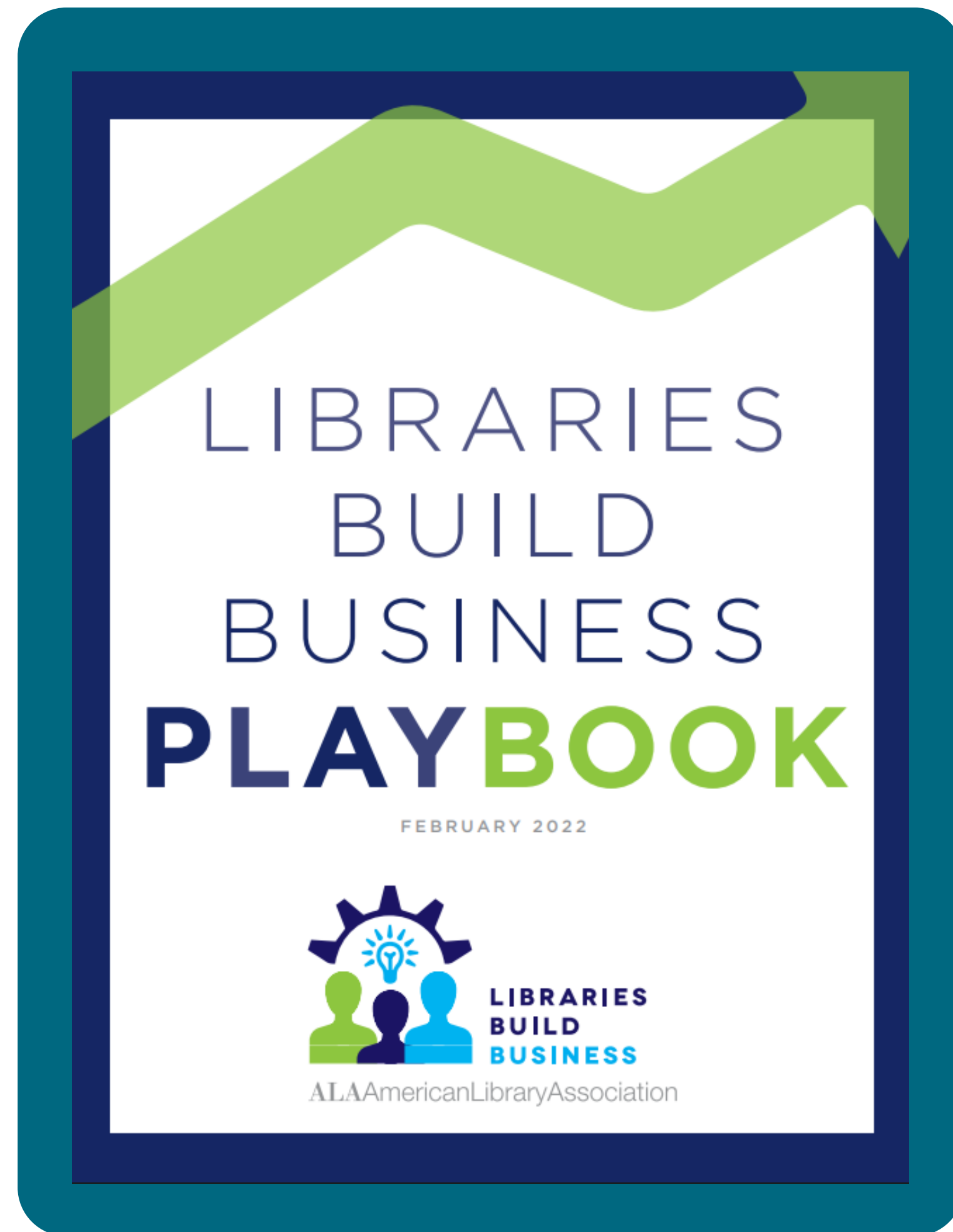
# Understand Your Community & Identify Priority Needs



“Research and consultation with business development experts indicate that **access to capital, gaps in financial literacy, and insufficient capital readiness** are significant growth barriers for many Wisconsin business owners.”

[Small Business, Big Stakes: The state of Wisconsin's Small Businesses, May 2026](#)

# Understand Your Community & Identify Priority Needs



[The Libraries Build Business Playbook, February 2022](#)

## What do people want to know when starting a business?

- **Business Plans:** What is a business plan? How do I develop one?
- **Market research:** Who is the local competition? Are there businesses in the area doing something similar?
- **Demographic research:** What is the socio-economic and cultural makeup of the area or neighborhood?
- **Legal Matters:** How do I set up my business legally? Where can I get free legal support?
- **Industry information:** What licenses or certifications are required for my business?
- **Local regulations and business license requirements:** What permits do I need? What upfront costs will I need to be aware of?
- **Small business financing:** Where do I find loans, investors, partners, and other stakeholders? How do I make a pitch to “sell” my idea?
- **Promotion:** How do I let people know that my business exists? How can I bolster my social media and online presence?

# Partnerships

## Email Introduction Template for a Business Support Organization

Subject Line: Request for a Meeting  
Dear [Name]:

Hello! I'm [name] from [library]. I'm reaching out to you because of the important role [organization] plays in our small business community. [If possible, add a sentence here about your connection to them or a specific reason their organization is important.] I'd like to learn more about your work and your goals. The library is increasing its focus on an equitable local economy, and I would love to understand how we can best support you. You may be surprised to find out how much the library has to offer small businesses – all for free.

Would you have some time to [chat with me / meet me for coffee / have a Zoom call] for half an hour in the next couple of weeks? I'm happy to meet in person or virtually.

I'm looking forward to learning more about how we might support our small businesses together.

Thank you for your time,

Name  
Library  
Contact Information



## Connect to Local Business Support Organizations

- WEDC
- Chambers of Commerce
- [Wisconsin Small Business Development Center \(SBDC\)](#)
- [Service Corps of Retired Executives \(SCORE\)](#)

Use the **Email Template for Introducing Yourself and the Library** from the [Libraries Build Business Communications Toolkit](#)

# Library Programs and Services

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## Workshops and Events

- Business Plan Basics
- Securing Your First Business Loan
- Navigating Business Licensing
- [Small Business Success Stories](#)

## Databases

- Business Source Premiere
- Reference Solutions or AtoZ
- Gale, Udemy or LinkedIn
- Census Business Builder
- “Leveraging Library Resources for Market Research”

## Space & Technology

- Meeting rooms, co-working spaces
- Laptops, printing, scanning, faxing
- Makerspaces

## 1:1 Support

- Book a Librarian appointments
- Business coaching or mentoring



Looking for a  
thought partner?  
Reach out to  
Kristina!

# Library Entrepreneur-in-Residence



MILWAUKEE  
PUBLIC LIBRARY

**Entrepreneur-In-Residence  
Entrepreneurship Lab**



Dr. Shakkiah Curtis

Mondays, 10:30 a.m.-12 p.m.  
March 17-April 21, 2025

Milwaukee Central Library, Innovation  
and Learning Lab (2nd floor)

[mpl.org/eir](http://mpl.org/eir)



- 1:1 Business Coaching
- Workshops, networking, increasing awareness of library resources
- Building connections and providing support

Made possible  
by the **WILS** Ideas to  
Action Fund

# Draft Your Plan

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## 1-YEAR GOAL

What do you want to achieve?



## SERVICES TO OFFER

What programs or support will you provide?



## RESOURCES NEEDED

What people, partners, tools, or funding do you need?



## 90-DAY ACTIONS

What will you do in the next 90 days?



## SUCCESS MEASURES

How will you know you're making an impact?

# Thank you

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## Remember to Connect with WEDC!