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SBA Announces Four New Regional Innovation Cluster Awards

WASHINGTON – U.S. Small Business Administration Administrator Maria Contreras-Sweet today announced the SBA’s support of four new Regional Innovation Clusters, adding to its portfolio of high-performing regional innovation networks across the country.

“Clusters are public-private partnerships that are driving innovation and job creation in our most promising regional hubs for innovation,” Contreras-Sweet said. “SBA has built a strategic infrastructure of financing and consulting networks in key regions to help new companies launch and small companies grown, particularly in underserved communities across the country. We’re unleashing the full potential of entrepreneurs who are developing cutting-edge products and processes that will help ensure American global competitiveness, creating support systems for small businesses in regions with the most need.”

The four Regional Innovation Cluster awardees, ranging from \$500,000 to \$550,000, were selected from more than 40 applicants and represent a wide range of diverse geographic areas and industries. From urban to rural, and clean technology to autonomous systems, these cluster initiatives focus on the most effective approaches to linking small businesses to regional networks of leading research, commercialization tools and financing.

SBA’s funding will be provided to each clusters organizing entity to strengthen opportunities for small businesses within the cluster. The funds will be used to provide mentoring and counseling services, mentor-protégé and teaming programming, and to showcase and pitch events to prospective investors and public-private sector adopters of new technology.

The four new Regional Innovation Clusters include:

Water Technology Cluster, Milwaukee, Wis.:

Already convening the highest concentration of companies focused on water technology in the nation, the cluster will utilize SBA funding to establish a Center of Excellence for Freshwater Innovation and Small Business Development. Co-located in the recently launched Global Water Center, the Center of Excellence will provide a myriad of small business services including technology transfer, counseling, acceleration and mentorship.

Marine Industries Science and Technology Cluster, I-10 Corridor (Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida):

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The Marine Industries Science and Technology (MIST) Cluster will focus on the Stennis Space Center's ecosystem of world class marine technology research, the highest concentration of oceanographers in the world, and a broad consortium of federal and state partners to provide targeted support for the creation and growth of small businesses involved in "blue technology."

Autonomous and Unmanned Systems Cluster, Southeastern New Mexico:

From precision agriculture and forestry management to clean energy development, Southeastern New Mexico is well-positioned to capitalize on the ever-increasing applications of autonomous and unmanned systems. By leveraging technical capabilities and federal research facilities to help catalyze new small business innovation, the cluster initiative will use SBA funding to provide specialized technology transfer assistance, targeted business counseling and teaming assistance programs. In coordination with other state and local partners, the cluster will inaugurate an 85,000 square-foot innovation hub that will include 3D manufacturing and prototyping tools and co-working space/incubation for autonomous system startups.

Retail, Supply Chain and Food Processing Cluster of the Ozarks Region, Northwest Arkansas, Northeast Oklahoma, and Southeast Missouri:

Anchored by three of the largest companies in retail, logistics and food processing, the Ozarks region is experiencing a startup ecosystem boom producing new ventures that provide strategic, technology-driven innovation in the value chains represented by these sectors. Funding will also be used to provide service delivery to underrepresented businesses in the region and business acceleration to two new cohorts in the ARK accelerator, a world renowned business accelerator.

Since 2010, the SBA has invested in regional clusters throughout the United States. The goal of the SBA's involvement in clusters is to increase small business participation and economic activity. For more information on the SBA's clusters initiative, visit www.sba.gov/clusters.

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