

# INNOVATION IN ACTION

2026 Entrepreneur Success Guide



Innovation often takes time



**MUSKEGON  
INNOVATION HUB**  
GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY®

# Meet the Team

## INNOVATION IN ACTION



Pictured L to R, Top Row: Tom Hopper, Associate Director for Business Development; Kevin Ricco, Executive Director; Jen Wakely, Assistant Director of Community and Programming; Linda Ray, Administrator. Bottom Row: Martha Colburn, Front Desk Staff; Sandra Briggs, Front Desk Staff; Cyndi Langlois, Community Empowerment Manager. Not Pictured: Diane Fleser, Grant Program Manager; Tom Hull, Maintenance and Operations

The Muskegon Innovation Hub at Grand Valley State University in downtown Muskegon is a premier business incubator dedicated to advancing entrepreneurship, innovation, and business growth. We provide personalized business coaching, a variety of training and programs, connections to funding opportunities, and collaborative workspace designed to support growth at every stage. Our mission is to strengthen West Michigan's economy and communities by fostering innovation, supporting small business development, and encouraging sustainable growth. Whether you're just getting started or ready to scale, the Hub is here to support your journey and fuel your next big step!

# Business Support & Funding

## DISCOVERY SESSIONS

Our free initial Discovery Session connects entrepreneurs with the Muskegon Innovation Hub team to explore business ideas, assess needs, and outline next steps for startup or business growth. During this one-on-one meeting, we identify goals, match relevant resources, and create a personalized plan that serves as the foundation for incubation, business coaching, or program participation.

*At Right: Executive Director, Kevin Ricco, welcomes clients to The Hub.*

*Below: Cailin Kelly of Northern Initiatives talks to entrepreneurs about funding opportunities available to support small business.*

**167**  
NEW COMPANIES  
SERVED  
THIS YEAR



# Business Support & Funding

## ELEVATEWEST ACCELERATOR

ElevateWest at the Hub is a cohort-based accelerator powered by CO.STARTERS. The program features three tailored tracks — **Get Started, Bootcamp and Core** — providing hands-on workshops, peer collaboration, and expert guidance to help entrepreneurs transform ideas or side hustles into sustainable, growth-ready businesses.



## INCUBATOR ONE-ON-ONE COACHING

Through the Hub's startup coaching engagement, entrepreneurs receive individualized support to move from concept to commercialization. Grounded in integrity, curiosity, and strategic guidance, the program empowers founders to make informed decisions, overcome challenges, and build sustainable ventures. This has helped emerging companies transform bold ideas into measurable progress and lasting impact.



## BUSINESS ACCELERATOR FUND (BAF) GRANT ENGAGEMENT



## HUB DIRECT GRANT AWARDS



Above: Small business owners celebrate receiving their Hub Direct Grant Awards, proudly holding their big checks.

The Michigan Business Accelerator Fund (BAF) provides grants through SmartZone accelerators, including the Hub, to support early-stage, high-tech Michigan companies. Awards typically range from **\$7K–\$15K**, with up to **\$75K** available for services like marketing, patents, or financial modeling — helping businesses achieve critical milestones, accelerate commercialization, and create jobs.

The Hub Direct Grant program empowers local entrepreneurs with funding that fuels growth and community development. Over **\$200K** has helped businesses reach milestones and overcome critical barriers — whether that's investing in new equipment, launching innovative programs, or reaching new customer markets — keeping talent, passion, and innovation thriving close to home.

# Programs & Events

211  
TOTAL EVENTS

## TRAININGS & WORKSHOPS

The Hub regular trainings and workshops designed to equip entrepreneurs with practical skills, industry knowledge, and strategic insights. Topics range from business planning and marketing to finance, operations, and growth strategies. Delivered by experienced professionals, these interactive sessions foster learning, networking, and hands-on application — helping local businesses and startups thrive at every stage of development.

## PITCH COMPETITIONS

Pitch competitions at the Hub give entrepreneurs the chance to present their business ideas to a panel of experts for feedback, exposure, and monetary awards. Participants can also attend **Pitch Perfection training** to craft compelling presentations and refine their Pitch Deck and messaging. These events foster innovation, build confidence, and connect startups with mentorship and resources to turn ideas into growth-ready ventures.



## TRAILBLAZER TALKS



The Trailblazer Talks series highlights visionary entrepreneurs and changemakers who share their journeys, lessons, and insights. These public talks inspire the community, spark connections, and offer practical wisdom on innovation, leadership, and overcoming challenges — all to motivate emerging leaders and business creators.

## LAKESHORE BUSINESS GROWTH EXPO



The Lakeshore Business Growth Expo is a free annual event connecting entrepreneurs and small businesses with resources, funding, and networking. Attendees explore workshops, meet experts, and access programs designed to accelerate growth — fostering collaboration, inspiration, and community impact across West Michigan.

77%  
COMPANIES  
SERVED  
FOR THE  
FIRST TIME

# Collaborative Spaces

## COLAUNCH COWORKING

CoLaunch is the Muskegon Innovation Hub's coworking space — a flexible, affordable workspace for entrepreneurs, freelancers, remote professionals, and creatives. Members get amenities like high-speed Wi-Fi, printing, a mailing address, a kitchenette, networking events, training resources, and varying membership levels to fit diverse needs.



143  
COLAUNCH  
COWORKING  
COMPANIES  
SERVED

## ART STUDIO COWORKING

The art studio space at the Hub provides artists, designers, and makers with an affordable, collaborative environment to create and grow. The space offers semi-private studios, shared work areas, and access to professional resources. Artists benefit from networking and connections with the broader entrepreneurial community, fostering creativity, innovation, and business development opportunities.

# Facility Rentals

476  
TOTAL  
COMPANIES  
SERVED

## TRAINING AND EVENT SPACE

The Hub offers a modern, flexible training and event space ideal for workshops, seminars, networking, and business gatherings. Equipped with advanced audio-visual technology, high-speed internet, and customizable layouts, the space accommodates groups of all sizes. Entrepreneurs, businesses, and organizations use it for professional development, collaborative events, and innovative programming in a creative and supportive environment.



Above: Michigan Sustainable Business Forum hosts the Lakeshore Climate Forum at The Hub.

At Left: Paola Mendiola of Grow talks to entrepreneurs about microloans available to support small business.

# Impact & Outcomes

2025 Metrics

<b>66</b> UNIQUE ORGANIZATIONS USED SPACE	<b>7406</b> EVENT & TRAINING ATTENDEES	<b>109</b> DIRECT JOBS CREATED	<b>733</b> JOBS RETAINED
<b>65%</b> WOMEN OWNED BUSINESSES	<b>8%</b> INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES	<b>61</b> PATENTS, TRADE- MARKS, COPYRIGHTS APPLIED FOR	<b>26</b> PATENTS, TRADE- MARKS, COPYRIGHTS AWARDED
<b>8%</b> VETERAN OWNED BUSINESSES	<b>94</b> COLAUNCH DAY PASSES	<b>72</b> COMPANIES EXPANDED	<b>144</b> COMMERCIALIZED PRODUCTS
<b>166</b> COLAUNCH PEOPLE SERVED	<b>16</b> COMPANIES CREATED	<b>\$32M</b> FOLLOW ON INVESTMENTS	<b>26</b> PRODUCTS LICENSED

# LAKESHORE INNOVATOR OF THE YEAR

Finalists for 2025 Lakeshore Innovator of the Year, L to R: Matt Cortez, Muskegon Public Schools; Brian Woods, Big Skinny's Pretzels; Keith Crandall, SeqSight (2025 Winner); Janyelle Milton, J Marie Premium Sneakers; Lashae Simmons II, Black Wall Street Muskegon



The Lakeshore Innovator of the Year Award honors visionary entrepreneurs, businesses, and community leaders who demonstrate outstanding innovation and impact. The program recognizes groundbreaking ideas, creative problem-solving, and contributions that strengthen West Michigan's economy, inspire others, and showcase the region as a hub for forward-thinking, entrepreneurial excellence and community-driven progress.



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