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WSU awarded \$51 million to advance smart manufacturing in South Kansas

By Tracee Friess, NIAR

The U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration (EDA) announced today will award \$51.4 million to Wichita State University to aid in the rapid development and adoption of emerging smart manufacturing technologies for South Kansas.

The funding, provided through the American Rescue Plan Build Back Better Regional Challenge, is the largest single award the university has received from the EDA.

“The Economic Development Administration is proud to support Wichita State University as it leads this coalition,” said Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Economic Development Alejandra Y. Castillo, who visited the university for a tour and industry roundtable this summer. “This EDA investment brings together world-class expertise from academic institutions, leading industry players, and the public sector to strengthen the southern Kansas regional economy.”

The South Kansas coalition’s effort, led by WSU’s National Institute for Aviation Research, are referred to as “Driving Adoption: Smart Manufacturing Technologies.” The program focuses on advancing regional efforts in the effective implementation of sustainable, smart and additive manufacturing technologies, increasing competitiveness and profitability for small and mid-sized businesses, and increasing the region’s global market share.

“The South Kansas Coalition is leveraging the region’s assets to expand aerospace production and build resiliency to thrive in a global market,” said Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo.

The grant is allocated to four priorities including \$9 million to expand and modernize training and research capacity; develop and deploy skills training need for high-velocity machining and smart factory technologies that are multi-faceted, flexible and resilient.

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President Rick Muma

The second priority, funded at \$14 million, is to provide business with the tools needed to successfully implement additive manufacturing into their supply chains and create qualified factories that deliver repeatable, robust parts.

\$26 million is allocated to expand training capacity through the construction of a new facility on campus to enable the delivery of high-tech, high-wage, high-demand career guidance for students and incumbent workers in Industry 4.0 technologies.

The remaining funding will support governance and evaluation from a coalition of industry, government and economic development leaders representing 27 counties in South Kansas, which will guide the vision with industry-defined, industry-prioritized, and industry-evaluated component projects supported by benchmark data and programmatic and ecosystem metrics.

“Wichita State is proud to be a part of the team responsible for building an effective plan to strengthen regional competitiveness through a focus on smart manufacturing,” said Wichita State President Rick Muma. “In all we do, our motivation is always to serve our students, our community and our state. This award will enable us to amplify those efforts, building a better and brighter tomorrow for all Kansans.”

The South Kansas Coalition is one of 21 winners – each a regional coalition of partnering entities – that will receive awards between \$25 and \$65 million to implement an average of six projects that together will enable each region's economic transformation and competitiveness. The awardees were chosen from 60 finalists in a Phase 1 applicant pool of 529 applications, which exemplifies the tremendous demand for transformational economic development across the country.

Additional thoughts:

“Congratulations to Wichita State University and the South Kansas Coalition on a successful bid for this significant investment to further expand and advance the state’s aerospace manufacturing capabilities,” said **U.S. Senator Jerry Moran**. “I was pleased to express support for this project to both the Department of Commerce and EDA, and look forward to the growth that will occur within the aerospace community both within the state and across the country thanks to this investment.”

“South Central Kansas has a long and prosperous history in the manufacturing sector,” said **U.S. Senator Roger Marshall**. “This award will allow Wichita State University and its regional partners to develop a workforce framework to support new skills, roles and jobs our smart manufacturing environment requires. My staff and I have worked alongside university staff during the application process and I applaud WSU for its forwarding-looking initiative and look forward to seeing the results of this proposal in action.”

“This investment will further one of my administration’s economic priorities: modernizing the manufacturing industry across Kansas, including in the southern part of the state,” said **Kansas Gov. Laura Kelly**. “I am confident that by further developing the aerospace workforce, adopting cutting-edge technologies, and supporting small manufacturers, WSU and the South Kansas Coalition will ensure we remain the aviation capital of the world for years to come.”

Wichita State’s National Institute for Aviation Research

NIAR's mission is to conduct research, transfer technology and enhance education for the purpose of advancing the nation's aviation industry, and to assist non-aviation industries that may benefit from aviation-related technologies.

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