2025 CEDA Finalists

- ***Business Expansion and Retention category***
  This award recognizes a single economic development project in which a community successfully mobilized to retain and/or expand an existing business of great importance to the community. Nominations should demonstrate extensive cross-community collaboration, innovation and responsiveness to the business in bringing the project to fruition.

    - **DeForest-Windsor Small Business Grant Program – Deforest, Wisconsin**
      The DeForest-Windsor Small Business Grant Program exemplifies innovation through intergovernmental collaboration. Jointly administered by the Community Development Authorities of the Villages of DeForest and Windsor and launched with funding from the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation, the program provides critical capital to small businesses undertaking facility improvements and repairs. Focusing on distressed and redevelopment areas, the program ensures resources reach businesses most in need, strengthening the backbone of the local economy. In its first round, $250,000 in grants supported twelve businesses, leveraging a total of $815,000 in local investment. This initiative stands out for its regional approach – treating two neighboring communities as one economic ecosystem – and its commitment to both traditional small businesses and agricultural enterprises. By fostering long-term property improvements and supporting overlooked sectors, the DeForest-Windsor Small Business Grant Program delivers immediate impact while building a sustainable foundation for future growth.

    - **FUNDiversity – Ashland, Wisconsin**
      Launched in 2023 by the Ashland Area Development Corporation, FUNDiversity is transforming economic opportunity in one of Wisconsin's most rural and lowest-income counties. Designed to dismantle barriers faced by women, Native Americans, People of Color, LGBTQ+, and justice-involved entrepreneurs, FUNDiversity provides the tools needed to build lasting businesses. Supported by a $1.88 million Diverse Business Assistance grant from Wisconsin's Department of Administration, the program offers business classes, one-on-one coaching, mentorship from diverse business owners, and targeted grants for down payments, legal, accounting, and marketing services. The impact has been significant: 165 entrepreneurs enrolled, more than 35 new businesses launched, 17 secured down payment grants, and 50 received professional service support. By pairing education with capital access, FUNDiversity has increased the viability, visibility, and sustainability of underserved entrepreneurs—proving that innovation and inclusion are key drivers of rural economic growth.

- **WRNC Business Opportunity Fund – Fond du Lac County, Wisconsin**
  The WRNC Business Opportunity Fund is a groundbreaking regional initiative tackling one of rural Wisconsin's greatest challenges: access to capital for small businesses. Launched in 2025 by the cities of Ripon and Waupun, the villages of Campbellsport and North Fond du Lac, and Envision Greater Fond du Lac, the fund combines a revolving loan program with hands-on technical assistance through the IGNITE program. By recycling loan repayments into future projects, the fund ensures long-term sustainability while offering entrepreneurs the guidance needed to thrive. Early applicants include Main Street expansions, bookstores, flower shops, and shared commercial kitchens—all driving downtown vitality, equity, and local job creation. Backed by state support from WEDC, the WRNC Fund prioritizes underserved business owners, strengthens the entrepreneurial ecosystem, and fosters innovation across communities. This collaborative, equity-first model transforms challenges into opportunities for sustainable rural growth.

- ***Economic Development Initiative category***
  This award recognizes innovation in community and economic development that promotes economic growth within communities and regions. Nominations should demonstrate how a program, project or initiative meets one of the following: 1.) Development and support of the community's entrepreneurial ecosystem; 2.) Development or expansion of driver industry sector initiatives; 3.) Programs aimed at assisting businesses with adoption of technology, artificial intelligence, and business best practices; and 4.) Significant placemaking initiatives that drive the greater good of the community).

  - **Food and Beverage (FAB) Innovation Campus – Jefferson County, Wisconsin**
    The Food and Beverage (FAB) Innovation Campus is a bold economic development initiative designed to strengthen one of Jefferson County's most important industries: food and beverage manufacturing. Led by Thrive Economic Development, Jefferson County, and the City of Jefferson, the 165-acre campus was purpose-built with specialized zoning, infrastructure, and site readiness to meet the unique needs of food processors. Its first anchor tenant, Kikkoman Foods Inc., is investing $560 million in a 240,000 sq. ft. facility that will begin production in 2026, creating high-quality jobs and expanding Wisconsin's role in global soy sauce production. Onego Bio, a pioneering food-tech company producing sustainable egg protein, will also be a campus tenant with its flagship U.S. facility. With nearly $1 billion in private investment to date, the FAB Innovation Campus exemplifies visionary planning, public-private collaboration, and industry-focused development—positioning Jefferson County as a premier hub for food and beverage innovation.

  - **Kenosha Innovation Center - Kenosha Innovation Neighborhood & Miron Construction – Kenosha, WI**
    The Kenosha Innovation Center is transforming a historic industrial site into a hub for entrepreneurship, technology, and workforce development. Opening in fall 2025,

this 64,000-square-foot facility is the flagship project of the Kenosha Innovation Neighborhood, a $24 million investment designed to fuel inclusive economic growth. Led by the Kenosha Innovation Neighborhood in partnership with the City of Kenosha, Miron Construction, and educational, philanthropic, and industry leaders, the Center provides flexible office space, R&D labs, and collaborative environments. It will host workforce training programs, entrepreneurship accelerators, and innovation-driven tenants in life sciences, tech, and advanced industries. More than a building, the Kenosha Innovation Center represents a new economic engine for Southeastern Wisconsin – bridging Kenosha's manufacturing legacy with its innovation-driven future. By fostering collaboration, preparing a future-ready workforce, and supporting startups and established companies alike, the Center exemplifies the vision of innovation, impact, and community transformation.

- **HATCH Idea Pitch Competition & BEAR Pitch Showcase – Chippewa County, Wisconsin**
  The Chippewa Economic Development Corporation (CEDC) is redefining Wisconsin's entrepreneurial ecosystem with two dynamic programs: the HATCH Idea Pitch Competition and the Business Expansion & Retention (BEAR) Pitch Showcase. Together, these initiatives support startups at critical stages. HATCH helps idea-phase entrepreneurs launch, while BEAR connects scaling businesses with investors to bridge the mid-stage capital gap. What sets these programs apart is their rural-rooted, statewide approach. By engaging hundreds of partners – from local EDCs and chambers to investor groups like Hill Capital Corporation, Tundra Angels, BrightStar Wisconsin, and Wisconsin Investment Partners – HATCH and BEAR provide mentorship, visibility, prize funding, and direct investor access. Since their expansion, these programs have empowered entrepreneurs across Wisconsin, fueling new ventures and strengthening investor-founder pipelines. By lowering barriers and amplifying innovation in underserved regions, CEDC's pitch programs are catalyzing economic growth and proving that groundbreaking ideas can emerge and thrive in every corner of the state.

- ***Real Estate Redevelopment & Reuse category***
  This award recognizes innovative real estate redevelopment or reuse projects that demonstrate measurable and quantitative impact on employment and tax base. Nominations should provide details as to why the project will/has served as a catalyst for economic and community development efforts. It should also demonstrate an innovative approach to development and should have been completed within the past 5 years.

  - **Collective on 4th – La Crosse, Wisconsin**
    Collective on 4th is a transformative redevelopment project in La Crosse, led by Cinnaire Solutions in partnership with the City of La Crosse and numerous community organizations. This $16.7 million, four-story development delivers 62 mixed-income apartments, including more than 20% reserved for individuals experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Built on a site once defined by blight and disinvestment, the project revitalizes a half-block of properties the City had spent

over a decade preparing for redevelopment. Located near downtown and major medical campuses, Collective on 4th not only expands access to affordable housing but also integrates onsite job training, employment counseling, and community amenities. As a cornerstone of the Pathways Home initiative to reach functional zero homelessness by 2029, Collective on 4th exemplifies innovative redevelopment. By combining housing, workforce development, and neighborhood reinvestment, it strengthens La Crosse's economy while ensuring opportunity and stability for its most vulnerable residents.

- **The Emree – F Street / City of West Bend – West Bend, Wisconsin**
  The Emree is a $31 million, 105-unit garden-style multifamily development that redefined downtown West Bend's future. Led by F Street with design by RINKA, the project transformed a former trucking site into a vibrant residential community featuring townhomes, apartments, and shared amenities including a clubhouse, fitness center, outdoor pool, and dog-wash station. This redevelopment not only addressed West Bend's critical shortage of modern housing but also resolved a long-standing land-use conflict. With City partnership, West Bend Transit successfully relocated its trucking operations while maintaining a Main Street office, removing heavy truck traffic from a walkable district and preserving a historic local business. Backed by $2.6 million in TIF support, city land contributions, and a forgivable loan, The Emree exemplifies a successful public-private partnership. Completed in 2025, the project delivers quality housing, expands the tax base, enhances downtown vitality, and serves as a catalyst for sustainable community growth.

- **The Collective Campus / Greater Watertown Community Health Foundation – Watertown, WI**
  The Collective Campus, led by the Greater Watertown Community Health Foundation, is a transformational redevelopment of the historic Bethesda Lutheran Home campus into a regional hub for health, housing, childcare, and community services. Backed by more than $100 million in public, private, and philanthropic investment, the project is breathing new life into a once-vacant institutional site while strengthening the City of Watertown's tax base. The campus now features a YMCA, early education and childcare centers, affordable housing developments, a women's shelter, mental and physical health services, nonprofit space, and an innovation coworking hub. Jefferson County's Youth Crisis Stabilization Facility also opened on the site—one of only three in the state—bringing critical care closer to home. By turning a long-dormant property into a 21st-century community asset, The Collective Campus stands as a model for collaborative redevelopment, addressing urgent regional needs while fostering sustainable economic and community growth.

- ***Talent Attraction, Development and Retention category***
  This award recognizes initiatives or programs that can document successful talent attraction, development, and retention outcomes. Nominations should identify how the program or initiative provided a strategic and innovative approach to meet one or more of following goals: Strengthening the skills of the workforce; talent attraction and retention; integration and alignment of economic and workforce development

activities; diversity and inclusion; and addressing barriers to employment such as childcare, housing and transportation.

- **Fond du Lac R.O.C.K. (Retention, Opportunity, Community, Knowledge) – Fond du Lac, Wisconsin**
  Fond du Lac R.O.C.K**.** is an innovative initiative by Envision Greater Fond du Lac that connects high school juniors and seniors with real career opportunities in their community. Designed to support the nearly 50% of local graduates undecided about their future, the program offers career exploration through business tours, job shadows, resume coaching, and interview practice. Since its launch in 2022, Fond du Lac R.O.C.K. has grown from serving 50 students to engaging more than 500 across seven school districts. With strong partnerships from businesses like C.D. Smith, J.F. Ahern, SSM Health, and Holiday Automotive, students gain firsthand exposure to industries ranging from healthcare to manufacturing. By bridging students with local employers and highlighting Fond du Lac County's diverse career pathways, the program strengthens workforce readiness, nurtures community pride, and fosters long-term talent retention – ensuring that Fond du Lac's future workforce is prepared, inspired, and invested.

- **Miron Construction Youth Apprenticeship Program – Neenah, WI**
  Miron Construction's Youth Apprenticeship (YA) Program is building Wisconsin's future workforce by giving high school students hands-on experience in the construction industry. Launched in 2023, the program provides meaningful on-the-job training, industry certifications, and mentorship from seasoned professionals, allowing students to apply classroom lessons in real-world settings—all while earning a paycheck. Guided by Miron's dedicated educational engagement manager, apprentices receive individualized support, career exploration opportunities, and structured pathways into Registered Apprenticeships. The program engages schools, parents, and community partners to showcase the trades as rewarding, high-demand careers, while Construction Showcases and Career Signing Days celebrate student achievements and build pride in the profession. With apprentices placed on job sites, in virtual construction, IT, and yard operations, Miron is growing a diverse and skilled talent pipeline. By addressing workforce shortages and strengthening community economies, the program exemplifies innovation in talent development and retention across Wisconsin.

- **West Allis Business Conference: Empowering Women Entrepreneurs – West Allis, Wisconsin**
  The City of West Allis, in partnership with the First-Ring Industrial Redevelopment Enterprise, proudly launched the inaugural *West Allis Business Conference: Empowering Women Entrepreneurs* on April 9, 2025. This first-of-its-kind, municipal-led initiative brought together more than 200 women business owners and aspiring entrepreneurs for a day of learning, inspiration, and authentic connection. Featuring keynote speaker Marla Poytinger, founder of Bars & Recreation, along with interactive breakout sessions led by local women entrepreneurs and experts, the event addressed real challenges facing women in business—from launching and funding to scaling and balancing work and life. The conference stood out for its inclusive, welcoming atmosphere, sparking new

partnerships, mentorships, and collaborations already shaping the community. Offered free of charge to eliminate barriers, the event set a new standard for municipal innovation in economic development. Its success ensures the conference will continue as a signature annual tradition, fueling growth and opportunity across West Allis.