

Press Release

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**University of Wisconsin-Platteville and Southwestern Wisconsin Regional
Planning Commission Selected to Receive Highly Competitive U.S. Economic
Development Administration Build to Scale Venture Challenge Grant**

*Federal Grants and Matching Dollars Represent a Combined Total of Almost \$1.1
Million of New Investment in Platteville*

[Rural Innovation Strategies, Inc.](#) (RISI), a social enterprise advancing inclusive economic development in rural America, today announced that the [University of Wisconsin-Platteville](#) and [Southwestern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission](#), who took part in their Rural Innovation Initiative, have secured [a Venture Challenge grant](#) via the U.S. Economic Development Administration's (EDA) [Build to Scale \(B2S\) program](#).

The University of Wisconsin-Platteville and the Southwestern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission participated in the second cohort of the [Rural Innovation Initiative](#), a technical assistance program empowering rural communities as they execute on innovation hub strategies. The Rural Innovation Initiative is made possible through a cooperative agreement between RISI and the EDA. The Initiative was launched in 2018 by RISI and its sister organization, the [Center On Rural Innovation \(CORI\)](#). In addition to the EDA, the [Siegel Family Endowment](#) and [Walmart](#) have provided funding for the Initiative.

“We are excited and inspired that Platteville received a B2S Venture Challenge grant this year,” said Matt Dunne, Executive Director of RISI and Founder of CORI. “In a time when the pandemic is creating a ‘rural moment,’ these funds will allow forward thinking small communities like Platteville to support local entrepreneurs to build new companies for the future.”

“Grantees were selected from a competitive pool of more than 600 applications and represent exemplary innovation and entrepreneurship from rural and urban areas across America,” said Dana Gartzke, Performing the Delegated Duties of the Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Economic Development. “In addition, projects in

federally-designated [Opportunity Zones](#) will bring new capital and opportunity to communities that traditionally have been ignored.”

“This award will expand our reach through our many partners to creating a compelling infrastructure and an environment that inspires innovation,” said Craig Beytien, Corporate Relations Executive Director at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville.

“Southwestern Wisconsin has a history of innovation and this program will further cultivate entrepreneurial inventiveness by providing a framework for development and growth,” said Troy Maggied, Executive Director of Southwestern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission. “This is a win for the entire region and another reason for start ups and existing businesses to choose Wisconsin.”

Since its inception in 2018, more than 250 communities have applied to participate in the Rural Innovation Initiative program. Selected participants receive a range of support as they refine their innovation hub strategies, including on-site visits from RISI staff, virtual strategy sessions through the B2S application period, and expert guidance along with templates and written resources. Participants are also invited to join the Rural Innovation Network, CORI’s growing community of practice that works with rural communities in 18 states and all 4 time zones to train residents in digital skills, employ them in new economy jobs, and empower them to launch the startups that will drive their future economies.

“We are tremendously proud of the work community leaders in our Rural Innovation Initiative have done to prepare for the Build to Scale grant opportunity,” said Leah Taylor, Rural Innovation Initiative Manager at RISI, who guided the communities through the B2S application. “They worked around the clock to refine their digital economy ecosystem strategies, and each community’s ideas have grown immensely during this project. There’s unlimited potential in small towns, and we’re continuing to see what that can look like all across the country.”

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About RISI

Rural Innovation Strategies, Inc. (RISI) is a social enterprise supporting inclusive economic development in small towns across the country. Working closely with its sister organization, the Center On Rural Innovation (CORI), RISI takes a comprehensive approach to economic development and uses data-driven strategies to build capacity for local change agents committed to creating sustainable digital economy ecosystems in their hometowns. These ecosystems center around innovation hubs that offer digital-job skills training, coworking spaces, remote/distributed work opportunities, support for

entrepreneurs scaling tech-enabled startups, access to capital, and plans to build local amenities and cultural resources. RISI also works to ensure that rural digital economy ecosystems are fully inclusive, creating opportunity for individuals historically excluded from technology careers. Learn more: <https://ruralinnovationstrategies.com/>

About the University of Wisconsin-Platteville

Founded in 1866, UW-Platteville offers 41 majors in three colleges: the College of Business, Industry, Life Science and Agriculture; the College of Engineering, Mathematics and Science; and the College of Liberal Arts and Education. The university offers two on-campus graduate programs. Online offerings include four undergraduate and 10 graduate programs. In addition, the university has branch campuses at UW-Platteville Baraboo Sauk County and UW-Platteville Richland.

The university has two upcoming building projects that will further enhance educational experiences for its approximately 7,000 students. Science building Boebel Hall is in the midst of a \$23.7 million renovation, and a new \$55 million engineering building, Sesquicentennial Hall, will break ground in the latter part of 2020.

Zippia ranked UW-Platteville as the best public university in the United States for getting a job in 2020. Learn more: <https://www.uwplatt.edu/>

About Southwestern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission:

The Southwestern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission works with communities and organizations to ensure a bright future for southwestern Wisconsin. Using professional planning and economic development tactics, the Planning Commission provides local expertise as well as federal resources to improve local amenities, help businesses flourish and create stronger towns. Learn more at www.swwprc.org.

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