

Berkshire Innovation Center gets nearly \$1 million to create 'manufacturing academy'

- By Tony Dobrowolski. The Berkshire Eagle Jul 26, 2022



The Berkshire Innovation Center will receive almost \$1 million in American Rescue Plan Act funds from the U.S. Department of Commerce to establish a manufacturing academy.

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PITTSFIELD — An additional \$1 million in American Rescue Plan Act funding is coming Pittsfield’s way, to the [Berkshire Innovation Center](#).

The U.S. Department of Commerce will give the center \$914,465 over two years to establish a “manufacturing academy” that’s meant to spur growth, and jobs, in that business sector.

The center opened in [2020](#) and is located at the William Stanley Business Park.

Federal money will be matched by \$330,000 in state and local funds.

The project seeks to spur growth in Berkshire County’s advanced manufacturing sector. It is expected, over time, to create 270 jobs, retain 153 positions, and generate \$12.6 million in private investment, according to a news release.

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Those jobs numbers are based on projections that the center received from companies participating in the initiative, according to the center's executive director, Ben Sosne.

Those firms include General Dynamics Advanced Mission Systems, Boyd Technologies, Interprint Inc., Sinicon Plastics, Modern Mold & Tool, Hi-Tech Mold & Tool, LTI Smart Glass and SolaBlock. All those Berkshire companies are heavily invested in "advanced" manufacturing.

The job figures are longterm projections, Sosne said, and are not expected to be achieved in two years.

"The EDA projects these four or five or six years out," Sosne said. "They're trying to stimulate something that fuels continued growth. This is going to help them achieve these goals."

"We need to use this as a spark to launch something that's sustainable," he said.

The academy will seek to solve persistent challenges facing the manufacturing economy in the Berkshires. One goal is to close the gap between local supply chain capabilities and the needs of larger manufacturers. That would be brought about, proponents say, through education, training, and technology assistance.

The BIC will host and manage the initiative, along with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Initiative for Knowledge and Innovation in Manufacturing.

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The lead industry partner is a BIC-member company, General Dynamics. The project is also supported by Berkshire Community College, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, the MassHire Berkshire Workforce Board and 1Berkshire.

Sosne said discussions about forming the academy began 18 months ago. Laura Brennan of the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission played a key role in getting the initiative established. Sosne said the academy is expected to start in September.

Among its offerings: technology bootcamps; a regional apprenticeship program using curriculum developed with MIT; and creation of a pool of training materials for participating firms.

The project received praise Tuesday from state and national politicians, including U.S. Rep. Richard E. Neal, D-Springfield.

“Massachusetts is at the forefront ... when it comes to innovation thanks in large part to partners like the Berkshire Innovation Center,” Neal said in a statement. “This funding will stimulate economic activity throughout the First Congressional District for years to come.”

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