

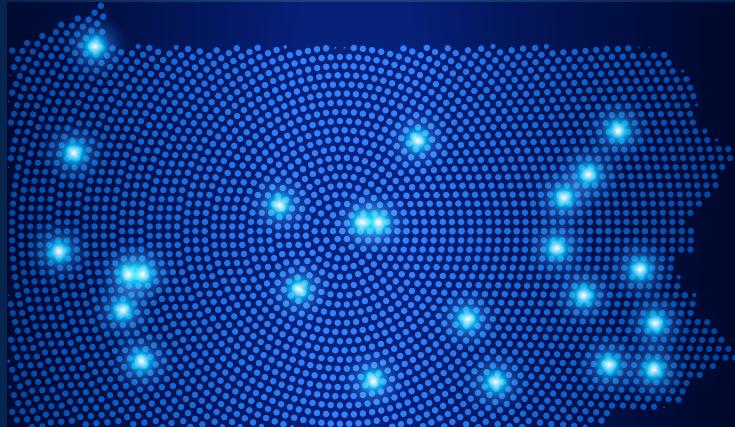


PennState

invent PENN STATE

ANNUAL IMPACT REPORT

FY 2024 - 2025



Statewide Economic
Development Program



Pennsylvania
Department of Community
& Economic Development

This project was financed in part by a grant from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Department of Community & Economic Development.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Grantee: The Pennsylvania State University

Project Name: Invent Penn State

Contract # C000091267

In the fiscal year 2024-25, Invent Penn State effectively leveraged its \$2.35 million in state program funding to expand and strengthen support for entrepreneurs and startups across Pennsylvania. Anchored by the LaunchBox and Innovation Network, now spanning 24 innovation spaces statewide, the initiative plays a critical role in advancing statewide economic development by addressing gaps in the entrepreneurial ecosystem and providing resources that help new ventures grow and thrive.

The state funding enabled Invent Penn State to deliver measurable progress toward its core objectives:

- **Expanding Statewide Reach:** Extending support to entrepreneurs in smaller towns and regions with limited access to resources, while establishing a 24th innovation space—the Williamsport LaunchBox supported by Ken and Kristie Healy at Penn College of Technology in Lycoming County—which opened November of 2025.
- **Acceleration and De-risking of Ventures:** Expanded technical assistance programs and added new prototyping and fabrication services, helping startups reduce risks and bring products to market more quickly.
- **Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Enhancement:** Increased focus on the strategic, financial, and legal needs of early-stage entrepreneurs to strengthen the foundation of new ventures.
- **Centralized Support Services:** Enhanced efficiency, capabilities, and data collection to maximize the impact of programs across the network.
- **Next-Generation Entrepreneurship Support:** Equipped students and young innovators with the skills, experiences, and exposure needed to succeed as the next generation of entrepreneurs.

Even as Penn State undergoes campus closures, state funding has ensured the LaunchBox and Innovation Network remains steadfast in local communities—continuing to serve as a trusted resource for entrepreneurs and as a strategic asset within the University's statewide footprint.

The entrepreneurial support and impact achieved through the funding include:

LaunchBox & Innovation Network and PennTAP	Educational accelerator programs delivered	32
	Companies graduated from educational accelerator programs	287
	Students engaged in entrepreneurial activity	4,726
	Internships created	68
	Students hired by startups or assisted companies	104
	Businesses assisted	1,414
	New jobs created	158.5
	Jobs retained	110
	New products commercialized	319
	Intellectual property (copyrights/software)	158
	Technology licenses	58
	Companies provided technical assistance	541
Penn State Law Clinics	Entrepreneurs received no-cost legal services	1,914

The community impact of Invent Penn State is illustrated through testimonials such as:

- "The Invent Penn State LaunchBox & Innovation Network as a whole has been amazing. I was pleasantly surprised by how open and supportive everyone was. Everyone, from business mentors to fellow participants, was incredibly supportive. Accessing this level of engineering and design support as a startup has made a real difference. We needed someone who could take our idea from a rough proof-of-concept prototype to something functional and test-ready. OriginLabs has helped move that forward in a steady, timely way. They've been transparent throughout the process, keeping us in the loop, and making sure the design stays aligned with our end goal of manufacturing. It's been a wonderful experience to see a concept we've had in our heads start to take real form and come to life."—**Erin Godfrey**, Founder, Joy Tac LLC (Lancaster County)
- "The Berks LaunchBox has been an incredible resource in my startup journey. From connecting me with key advisors and funding opportunities to providing hands-on mentoring and patent research support, their guidance has been invaluable. Through their network, I was introduced to Ben Franklin Partners of NE PA and given access to a \$4K grant opportunity, helping me take critical steps toward growth. Their support has truly made a difference in bringing my vision to life." —**Munish Munagala**, Cofounder, Agent23.AI, (Berks County)

- “I was amazed by all of the services I was able to receive from Invent Penn State without upfront funding. The Innovation Commons team helped me bring an idea I had in my head to life with a real prototype. Their support, transparency, and dedication to my vision have been instrumental. I’m incredibly grateful for the progress I’ve made and excited for what comes next on this journey.” —**Amber Harris**, Founder, Babys Breath, LLC (Allegheny County)
- “PennTAP’s assistance was really valuable. Beyond the grant the PennTAP team helped us secure, we were able to connect with community leaders and other Penn State resources like the Scranton LaunchBox, which pulled together client focus groups for us. This helped us refine our client profiles. The LaunchBox also helped us refine our strategic plan and connect with local banks.” —**Jason Engerman**, Co-founder, US Mortgage Notes, Inc. (Lackawanna County)

Additional case studies and testimonials are provided in Appendix B. Together, these accomplishments highlight the initiative’s ongoing commitment to driving innovation, strengthening Pennsylvania’s economy, and building a vibrant, statewide entrepreneurial ecosystem.

The LaunchBox and Innovation Network across Pennsylvania:



1 Abington LaunchBox	7 Digital Foundry at New Kensington	13 James R. Meehl Innovation Commons (Behrend)	19 Schuylkill LaunchBox
2 Altoona LaunchBox supported by the Hite Family	8 Fayette LaunchBox	14 Lehigh Valley LaunchBox	20 Scranton LaunchBox
3 Beaver Valley LaunchBox	9 Great Valley LaunchBox	15 Mon Valley LaunchBox	21 Shenango LaunchBox powered by the Greater Sharon Community
4 Berks LaunchBox	10 Happy Valley LaunchBox powered by PNC Bank	16 Mont Alto LaunchBox	22 Wilkes-Barre LaunchBox
5 Brandywine LaunchBox	11 Harrisburg LaunchBox	17 North Central PA LaunchBox	23 Williamsport LaunchBox supported by Ken and Kristie Healy
6 Corner LaunchBox	12 Hazleton LaunchBox supported by Pasco L. Schiavo, Esq.	18 OriginLabs	24 York LaunchBox

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	4
OVERVIEW	5
ACTIVITY SUMMARY.....	6
CASE STUDIES.....	9
NEXT STEPS.....	13
LESSONS LEARNED	13
APPENDIX A: PROJECT NARRATIVE.....	16
APPENDIX B: INVENT PENN STATE CASE STUDIES	17

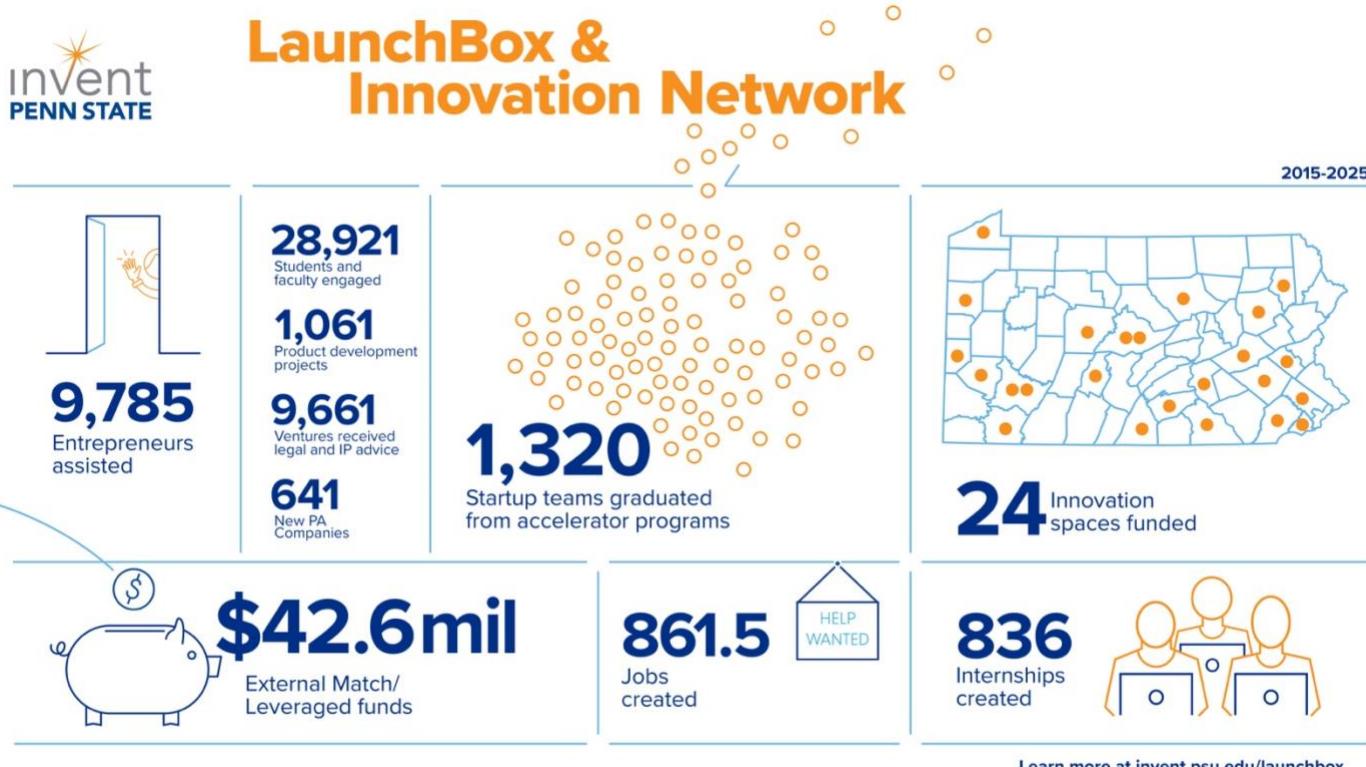
OVERVIEW

Invent Penn State is more than just an initiative—it's a transformative effort that's reimagining Penn State's historic land-grant mission by extending the promise of innovation and entrepreneurship across the Commonwealth.

With 96% of Pennsylvanians living within 30 miles of a Penn State campus, the University has a unique opportunity to unlock the state's innovation potential. Through Invent Penn State, entrepreneurs—whether or not they have a Penn State connection—gain free access to accelerator programs, co-working spaces, legal and intellectual property support, mentorship, rapid prototyping facilities, pitch competitions, and critical funding resources that help de-risk and accelerate startup ventures.

Amid broader Penn State campus closures, the LaunchBox and Innovation Network remains a cornerstone of the University's statewide presence. These locations continue to provide vital access points for entrepreneurship and economic development, ensuring continuity of services and reinforcing Penn State's long-term commitment to local communities.

The Invent Penn State LaunchBox and Innovation Network extends access to regions of the Commonwealth where innovation resources are less readily available, placing them on the front lines of Pennsylvania's entrepreneurial transformation. Since their launch in 2015, these LaunchBox locations have played a pivotal role in empowering entrepreneurs, engaging local communities, offering legal and intellectual property guidance, supporting startups, and fostering new collaborations.



ACTIVITY SUMMARY

Grantee: The Pennsylvania State University

Project Name: Invent Penn State

Contract # C000091267

Data Report for Fiscal Year 2024-2025 (July 1, 2024, through June 30, 2025)	
Jobs Created	158.5
Jobs Retained	110
Private Funds Leveraged	\$1,964,278
Public Funds Leveraged	\$1,418,500
Businesses Assisted	1,414
New Technology Companies Formed	312
Venture Investments Made	\$0
Patents Issued	5
Intellectual Property (Copyrights/software)	158
Technology Licenses	58
New Products Commercialized	319
New Startups Domiciled in PA Communities	691
Startup Competitions Held	21
Community Educational Events	321
Companies Assisted with Product Development	439
Companies Provided with Technical Assistance	541
Internships Created	68
Entrepreneurs Receiving No-Cost Legal Services (Entrepreneur Assistance Legal Clinic)	1,464
Entrepreneurs Receiving No-Cost Intellectual Property Legal Services (Intellectual Property Legal Clinic)	450

Educational Accelerator Programs Delivered	32
Companies Graduated from Educational Accelerator Programs	287
Students Engaged in Entrepreneurial Activity	4,726
Students Hired by Startups or Assisted Companies	104
Patents/Provisional Patents Filed	20
Cumulative Funding Received by Program Graduates	\$98,476,575

In FY 2024-25, Invent Penn State leveraged \$2.35 million in program funding to expand services for entrepreneurs and startups across the Commonwealth. Through the LaunchBox and Innovation Network's 24 innovation spaces, the initiative delivered technical assistance, prototyping and fabrication services, and pro bono legal support to fill gaps in Pennsylvania's entrepreneurial ecosystem and advance economic development.

This investment enabled Invent Penn State to accelerate and de-risk new ventures with targeted startup resources; strengthen entrepreneurship ecosystems by addressing the strategic and legal needs of early-stage entrepreneurs; improve efficiency and impact through enhanced centralized services; and equip the next generation of innovators with the skills and experiences needed for long-term success.

The results of this work are clear. Over the past year, the Network assisted 1,414 businesses statewide, generated 158 new jobs and retained 110 existing jobs, supported the commercialization of 319 new products, and contributed to the creation of 158 intellectual property assets and 58 technology licenses. Together, these outcomes demonstrate how state investment translates into measurable economic growth and entrepreneurial impact across Pennsylvania.

Programmatically, the LaunchBox and Innovation Network delivered 32 educational accelerator programs that graduated 287 companies, while also offering one-on-one consulting, educational workshops, startup competitions, and access to co-working and makerspaces. In partnership with PennTAP, the Network provided technical assistance to 541 companies, ranging from prototyping and product development for entrepreneurs to energy grants, operational assessments, and technical guidance for manufacturers, municipalities, schools, farmers, and economic development agencies.

Legal support also remained a cornerstone of the model. The Penn State Dickinson Law Entrepreneur Assistance Clinic (EAC) and Intellectual Property (IP) Clinic delivered pro bono legal services to more than 1,900 entrepreneurs and companies, assisting in the creation of over 690 new Pennsylvania companies and filing 20 provisional patents.

Students continued to benefit as well, with 4,726 engaged in entrepreneurial activity, leading to 68 internships and opportunities for 104 students to assist or be hired by Pennsylvania startups. To ensure the Network remains cutting-edge, Invent Penn State's Centralized Services team provided more than 16 hours of specialized training to LaunchBox staff on lean startup, human-centered design, and data collection practices—further strengthening ecosystem reach and impact.

Amid broader Penn State campus closures, the LaunchBox and Innovation Network has remained steadfast in its commitment to local communities.

Each location is working to stabilize operations and ensure continuity of services, maintaining its presence as a trusted resource for entrepreneurs. Looking ahead, the Network will remain a strategic asset within the University's statewide footprint—continuing to deliver entrepreneurial support and drive economic development impact across Pennsylvania.

Below are selected case studies from the Network. Additional examples—25 in total—are provided in Appendix B.

CASE STUDIES

Bringing Tactical Innovation to Life for a Veteran Student Entrepreneur in Lancaster County – Harrisburg LaunchBox (Dauphin County) and OriginLabs (Centre County)

As officer training continues to evolve, Penn State Harrisburg student Erin Godfrey saw an opportunity to improve the equipment designed to support it. A U.S. Marine Corps veteran and kinesiology student, Godfrey partnered with her husband—a law enforcement officer and defensive tactics instructor—to launch Joy Tac LLC, a company focused on developing a safer, more responsive firearm holster better aligned with modern training needs.

"All officers, no matter what call they respond to, have a deadly weapon present because they carry one," Godfrey said. "Over the past decade, there's been a push to use hands more than weapons, but current equipment hasn't adapted to support this training. Today's holsters slow draw speed and aren't as safe as they could be. We thought, 'If no one else is going to make it safer, we will.'"

Using body cam footage and body positioning analysis, Godfrey developed the Singular Press Angular Retention (SPAR) system to replace traditional mechanical retention found in firearm holsters.

Godfrey approached the Harrisburg LaunchBox in November 2024 for support in developing her product and value proposition. In working with the LaunchBox, she received support in conducting customer discovery, developing her pitch deck, and connecting with the innovation ecosystems for additional resources and funding. Godfrey participated in several Invent Penn State startup programs, including the Harrisburg LaunchBox Veterans Business Bootcamp (November 2024), the Invent Penn State Inc.U Competition (March 2025), and the Happy Valley LaunchBox Summer Founders Program (May–July 2025). Joy Tac was awarded first place in both the Veterans Business Bootcamp and the Inc.U Competition, winning more than \$20,000 in total funding.

Godfrey credited Amma Johnson, director of the Harrisburg LaunchBox powered by Penn State, for extensive support in refining her presentation prior to the pitch competitions. Alum and veteran entrepreneur-in-residence Haley McClain Hill also helped Godfrey simplify and clarify her product's explanation, drawing from her experience mentoring Godfrey in the Veterans Business Bootcamp.

"The Invent Penn State LaunchBox & Innovation Network as a whole has been amazing," Godfrey said. "I was pleasantly surprised by how open and supportive everyone was. Everyone, from business mentors to fellow participants, was incredibly supportive."

Godfrey approached Invent Penn State's fabrication lab, OriginLabs, in March 2025. She had a rough proof-of-concept prototype and a provisional patent pending but lacked the engineering expertise to develop a functional, manufacturable product. OriginLabs Service Bureau offered comprehensive design and prototyping services, including CAD modeling, laser cutting, and 3D printing. Starting with a strong but rudimentary prototype, OriginLabs Service Bureau Manager Tristan Hess collaborated with the client across multiple design iterations and feedback sessions. Over several months, the project evolved toward a polished, functional prototype ready for patent acquisition and scalable manufacturing.

"Accessing this level of engineering and design support as a startup has made a real difference," Godfrey said. "We needed someone who could take our idea from a rough proof-of-concept prototype to something functional and test-ready. OriginLabs has helped move that forward in a steady, timely way. They've been transparent throughout the process, keeping us in the loop, and making sure the design stays aligned with our end goal of manufacturing. It's been a wonderful experience to see a concept we've had in our heads start to take real form and come to life."

Advancing Therapy Through Gaming – PennTAP (Clearfield County)

Rich McCracken, a retired lab technician and current substitute high school teacher, is the inventor and owner of Stackable 3D Tic Tac Toe LLC in Clearfield County. The therapeutic game board has potential applications in both physical therapy and education. After a severe hand injury from a saw, McCracken envisioned a product that could help patients improve motor skills and encourage strategic thinking. To make that vision a reality, he needed to refine the design and add digital capabilities.

After being referred to PennTAP by Ben Franklin Technology Partners of Central and Northern PA and the PennWest Clarion SBDC, McCracken began collaborating with PennTAP Advisor Jenn Jones. Together, they set two main priorities: redesigning the therapy board to be lighter, more adaptable, and more functional, and adding digital capabilities to track progress.

To bring these ideas to life, PennTAP connected McCracken with two Penn State Learning Factory senior engineering teams. The physical redesign team improved the board's structure by incorporating 3D-printed components, lighter materials, and a dovetail-style docking system that allows multiple boards to connect. They also created therapy stands that can rotate 180 degrees, enabling a wider range of rehabilitation exercises that engage different muscle groups.

Meanwhile, the digital design team developed a programming framework capable of recording puzzle completion times, wins, difficulty levels, and gameplay modes. They also implemented secure cloud sharing, allowing therapists, doctors, and physical therapy patients to review progress from any location.

The collaboration improved the board's usability, durability, and versatility, opening new possibilities in physical therapy, special education, and public settings. Student-led testing provided valuable insights into materials and functionality, guiding future enhancements.

PennTAP also helped McCracken secure \$8,000 in combined funding from the Farrell Center Voucher Program and other Learning Factory resources, covering the full cost of both projects.

Beyond the technical advancements, McCracken valued the opportunity to mentor the Learning Factory students.

“PennTAP connected me to resources that provided opportunities I would never have found, including helping to find full funding for both projects,” he said.

Inspired by the collaboration, McCracken hopes to connect local high school students interested in engineering and related industries with organizations such as the Learning Factory.

With PennTAP’s guidance and the creativity of Penn State students, Stackable 3D Tic Tac Toe is poised to become a widely available tool that brings therapeutic benefits to patients needing physical therapy and educational value to learners.

Transforming an AI-Powered Software Idea into a Winning Business - Berks LaunchBox (Berks County)

When software engineers Munish Munagala and Himali Vaid founded Agent23.AI, they had the technical skills to build their product, but needed structure, business guidance, and connections to build a viable business. They found that support at the Berks LaunchBox.

Agent23.AI provides AI-powered Tier-1 customer service for small businesses in industries like HVAC, plumbing, and other service sectors. Its AI agents work across web chat, text, phone, and email, handling appointment scheduling, follow-ups, and reminders—streamlining operations and improving customer experience.

Although Munish had decades of experience in enterprise IT, he had never pitched a business before. When he joined the 2024 Berks LaunchBox Idea TestLab, he says it completely shifted how he approached his idea. “Idea TestLab put a structure around how to think about my business,” he explains. “I began learning new ways to better understand my customer and the problem they are trying to solve. I had never delivered a business pitch, created a slide deck for one, nor even been to a pitch competition—but the coaching, feedback, and mock pitch sessions gave me the confidence to step onto that stage.”

Over six weeks, Munish worked closely with startup coaches, collaborated with other entrepreneurs, and refined his business model. The program culminated in a pitch competition. “The feedback I received from the coaches was incredibly valuable,” Munish says. “I practiced every day leading up to the event, and during the pitch, I decided to call my chatbot live in front of the judges. That demo turned out to be a game changer.” The strategy worked—Munish took first place and a \$1,000 prize to invest in his company.

Berks LaunchBox also connected Munish with key advisors, funding opportunities, and patent research support. Through their network, he was introduced to Ben Franklin Partners of NE PA and awarded a \$4,000 grant to help advance the business. “The Berks LaunchBox has been an incredible resource in my startup journey,” he says. “From connecting me with key advisors and funding opportunities to providing hands-on mentoring, their guidance has been invaluable. Their support has truly made a difference in bringing my vision to life.”

Today, Agent23.AI is piloting its technology with an HVAC company, where its AI handles customer support calls, debugs minor issues, and schedules technicians without human intervention. The team is also pursuing SOC certification and exploring opportunities to expand into other industries.

Helping to Advance a Life-Saving Infant Oral Care Device in Allegheny County - James R. Meehl Innovation Commons (Erie County)

When Amber Harris became a first-time mom, she was surprised by how few products addressed oral hygiene for babies before they grew their first teeth. Learning that nearly one-third of infants under six months develop oral thrush—a painful fungal infection—she set out to create Gums N Brush, a safe, simple, and effective device paired with an organic, non-abrasive cleaning fluid to help prevent the condition.

Amber had the vision, but she needed technical expertise to bring her idea to life. That’s when she turned to the James R. Meehl Innovation Commons at Penn State Behrend. There, the team helped her design her first prototype, complete the technical drawings, and connect with Penn State’s Intellectual Property Clinic to file a provisional patent.

After gathering feedback and conducting further research, Amber returned to Innovation Commons to collaborate on a second version of her product—vastly improving upon the first design. She is now pursuing a second provisional patent and working toward a full patent.

“Innovation Commons was instrumental in turning my idea into a functional prototype,” Amber says. “I was amazed by all of the services I was able to receive from Penn State without upfront funding. Their support, transparency, and dedication to my vision have been invaluable. I’m incredibly grateful for the progress I’ve made and excited for what comes next on this journey.”

Amber’s entrepreneurial momentum didn’t stop there. With connections from PennTAP, she partnered with faculty at Penn State’s Huck Institute of Life Sciences for fluid safety and efficacy testing. She also began working with biomedical engineering faculty and students to advance testing—a rare and hard-to-access service. PennTAP is now helping her pursue a PA Manufacturing Innovation Grant to further her work.

Looking ahead, Amber plans to apply to accelerator programs, seek additional mentorship, refine her business plan, and identify manufacturing partners. Thanks to Innovation Commons and the Penn State network, Baby’s Breath is now well on its way to delivering an innovative oral care solution for the youngest and most vulnerable patients.

NEXT STEPS

To increase impact and advance its mission, Invent Penn State has identified the following strategic priorities for the year ahead:

Expanding Access Across the Commonwealth

Invent Penn State will continue to grow the LaunchBox and Innovation Network to ensure entrepreneurs statewide have access to advanced prototyping, digital fabrication, and industry 4.0 capabilities. A key milestone will be the opening of the 24th innovation space, the Williamsport LaunchBox, supported by Ken and Kristie Healy at Penn College of Technology, which is expected to become a hub for local entrepreneurs, students, and community innovation.

Strengthening Capacity and Service Quality

Innovation spaces are deepening collaboration across the Network by linking LaunchBoxes, makerspaces, fabrication labs, and partners such as Pennsylvania's Veterans Business Outreach Center (VBOC). By coordinating resources and expertise, the Network can deliver seamless, end-to-end support for entrepreneurs at every stage of their journey. This approach ensures that, even amid Penn State campus closures, LaunchBoxes remain accessible, resilient, and well-resourced anchors for economic development in their communities.

Accelerating Technology-Driven Innovation

Facilities such as the Digital Foundry in New Kensington, OriginLabs in State College, and the North Central PA LaunchBox are equipping entrepreneurs and businesses with advanced tools in robotics, additive manufacturing, and digital design. These resources not only help startups and established companies reduce risk and accelerate product development but also spark collaborations with K-12 schools and workforce initiatives that prepare Pennsylvanians for the jobs of tomorrow. The Network will continue to adapt to ensure these spaces remain operational, strategically connected, and accessible statewide.

Empowering Staff to Maximize Impact

The Network's success depends on the expertise and leadership of its staff. Centralized Services will continue to expand professional development opportunities in lean startup methodology, design thinking, customer discovery, and data-driven decision-making. Train-the-trainer programs, mentorship, and cross-site collaboration will ensure staff are equipped to deliver high-value programming, create supportive environments, and respond effectively to the evolving needs of entrepreneurs and local economies.

LESSONS LEARNED

Over nine years and across 24 locations, Invent Penn State has refined its model through continuous learning and adaptation. The Network operates with a “test-and-learn” approach, enabling ongoing evaluation and continuous improvement of programs, services, and resources. In the last fiscal year, several key insights emerged that will shape future strategy:

- **Raising Visibility and Sharing Success Stories**

Building awareness remains essential for attracting new entrepreneurs, collaborators, and funding partners. This year underscored the importance of coordinated storytelling—leveraging both local and statewide channels to highlight innovation space successes, cross-Network collaborations, and measurable economic impact. The launch of the Williamsport LaunchBox illustrates how publicizing new facilities and partnerships can generate early momentum, community engagement, and donor interest.

- **Expanding Access Through Regional Collaboration**

Ecosystem mapping continues to reveal opportunities to reach entrepreneurs and small businesses in areas with limited access to startup resources. A key lesson this year is that these needs can often be addressed more effectively through regional collaboration—pooling expertise and programming across multiple innovation spaces to create specialized offerings that no single location could sustain alone. This model also builds resilience against fluctuations in local capacity.

- **Strengthening Centralized Support for Statewide Impact**

Centralized Services remain a critical driver of efficiency, resource-sharing, and growth across the Network. Strategic site visits and ongoing engagement have identified opportunities for program alignment, shared service models, and collaborative funding strategies. A major lesson from this year is the importance of cross-location systems—such as shared CRM tools, standardized reporting, and joint program calendars—which reduce duplication, increase impact, and sustain high-quality services statewide despite structural changes in Penn State’s campus system.

- **Deepening Engagement with Leadership**

Regular dialogue with Penn State campus chancellors, local government officials, and community leaders continues to be vital for sustaining momentum. This year reinforced the value of involving leadership early in strategic planning and program development to align priorities, secure buy-in, and position innovation spaces as community anchors for entrepreneurship and economic growth. In the context of campus restructuring, proactive engagement is especially critical for maintaining stability and visibility.

- **Leveraging Cross-Network Collaboration as a Strategic Asset**

A new insight this year is the power of intentional collaboration among LaunchBoxes, makerspaces, fabrication labs, and external partners such as the Veterans Business Outreach Center (VBOC). By working as a “network of networks,” Invent Penn State expands reach, enhances service quality, and creates a seamless experience for entrepreneurs. This approach increases resilience and ensures that—even as the campus landscape evolves—the full suite of entrepreneurial resources remains accessible to every community served.

APPENDIX A: PROJECT NARRATIVE

Pennsylvania possesses many of the assets needed for innovation-driven growth, including world-class research universities, a diverse talent base, and a strong manufacturing legacy. Yet, in recent years, these assets have not consistently translated into broad-based, high-quality economic growth. Pennsylvania ranks seventh out of nine peer states and last among eight high-growth states in the formation of new technology firms. When innovation-driven economic development is occurring, it is concentrated primarily in a few metro areas, leaving many regions of the Commonwealth without comparable access to opportunity.

In 2015, Penn State President Emeritus Eric J. Barron founded Invent Penn State to address this challenge by leveraging the reach of Penn State's campuses to stimulate new business creation, job growth, and economic development across the state. The flagship initiative of Invent Penn State is the LaunchBox and Innovation Network, a statewide system of 24 innovation spaces that provide no- or low-cost support to Pennsylvania entrepreneurs and businesses, regardless of their affiliation with Penn State.

The mission of Invent Penn State is to accelerate the movement of great ideas into the marketplace and drive job creation by:

- Providing local access to the resources, mentorship, and facilities entrepreneurs need to de-risk and accelerate their ventures, including technical assistance through PennTAP and no-cost legal and intellectual property support through Penn State Dickinson Law Clinics.
- Identifying service and resource gaps for Pennsylvania entrepreneurs and working to close them by connecting local, regional, and statewide economic development partners inside and outside the University.
- Offering centralized support to the Network to help scale specialized programs and increase collective impact across the Commonwealth.
- Creating opportunities for students to build and practice entrepreneurial skills that prepare them for career success, while also encouraging them to test and launch new business ideas.

Expected outcomes include jobs created and retained, leveraged private and public funds, patents issued, companies formed and supported, accelerator programs and graduates, technical and product development assistance, legal assistance, educational events, internships created, students engaged, and students hired by or assisting companies. Please see the operating plan for detailed metrics.

The Commonwealth's core investment is essential to attracting additional funding from private sector, federal, and University sources. Penn State has a strong track record of securing leveraged funding, including private donations, corporate sponsorships, and foundation grants. Invent Penn State also leverages support from federal agencies such as the National Science Foundation (NSF), the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), and the Economic Development Administration (EDA). In the current year, the program aims to attract more than \$1 in additional funding for every \$1 of state support—multiplying the impact of the Commonwealth's investment.

APPENDIX B: INVENT PENN STATE CASE STUDIES

[Pennsylvania Technical Assistance Program \(PennTAP\)](#)

[Digital Foundry \(New Kensington\)](#)

[OriginLabs \(State College\)](#)

[Penn State Law Entrepreneur Assistance Clinic \(EAC\)](#)

[Abington LaunchBox powered by Penn State](#)

[Altoona LaunchBox supported by the Hite Family](#)

[Beaver Valley LaunchBox powered by Penn State Beaver](#)

[James R. Meehl Innovation Commons \(Penn State Behrend\)](#)

[Berks LaunchBox powered by Penn State](#)

[Brandywine LaunchBox powered by Penn State](#)

[North Central PA LaunchBox powered by Penn State DuBois](#)

[Fayette LaunchBox powered by Penn State](#)

[Great Valley LaunchBox powered by Penn State](#)

[Mon Valley LaunchBox powered by Penn State Greater Allegheny](#)

[Harrisburg LaunchBox powered by Penn State](#)

[Hazleton LaunchBox powered by Pasco L. Schiavo, Esq.](#)

[Lehigh Valley LaunchBox powered by Penn State](#)

[Mont Alto LaunchBox powered by Penn State](#)

[Corner LaunchBox powered by Penn State \(New Kensington\)](#)

[LionLaunch \(Penn State Schuylkill innovation space\)](#)

[Scranton LaunchBox powered by Penn State](#)

[Shenango LaunchBox powered by the Greater Sharon Community](#)

[Happy Valley LaunchBox powered by PNC Bank \(University Park\)](#)

[Wilkes-Barre LaunchBox powered by Penn State](#)

[York LaunchBox powered by Penn State](#)

Pennsylvania Technical Assistance Program (PennTAP)

Company Assisted: Stackable 3D Tic Tac Toe LLC

Address: Clearfield County, PA

Contact: Rich McCracken, Owner

Industry Focus: Healthcare & Rehabilitation Technology, Gaming for Therapy/Education

Demographic Profile: Not minority-, women- or veteran-owned

Company Offering: Therapeutic and educational gaming tool designed to support physical therapy, special education, and community engagement.

Need for Support:

Rich McCracken, a retired lab technician and current substitute high school teacher, is the inventor and owner of Stackable 3D Tic Tac Toe LLC in Clearfield County. The therapeutic game board has potential applications in both physical therapy and education. After a severe hand injury from a saw, McCracken envisioned a product that could help patients improve motor skills and encourage strategic thinking. To make that vision a reality, he needed to refine the design and add digital capabilities.

Assistance Provided:

After being referred to PennTAP by Ben Franklin Technology Partners of Central and Northern PA and the PennWest Clarion SBDC, McCracken began collaborating with PennTAP Advisor Jenn Jones. Together, they set two main priorities: redesigning the therapy board to be lighter, more adaptable, and more functional, and adding digital capabilities to track progress.

To bring these ideas to life, PennTAP connected McCracken with two Penn State Learning Factory senior engineering teams. The physical redesign team improved the board's structure by incorporating 3D-printed components, lighter materials, and a dovetail-style docking system that allows multiple boards to connect. They also created therapy stands that can rotate 180 degrees, enabling a wider range of rehabilitation exercises that engage different muscle groups.

Meanwhile, the digital design team developed a programming framework capable of recording puzzle completion times, wins, difficulty levels, and gameplay modes. They also implemented secure cloud sharing, allowing therapists, doctors, and physical therapy patients to review progress from any location.

Outcomes:

The collaboration improved the board's usability, durability, and versatility, opening new possibilities in physical therapy, special education, and public settings. Student-led testing provided valuable insights into materials and functionality, guiding future enhancements.

PennTAP also helped McCracken secure \$8,000 in combined funding from the Farrell Center Voucher Program and other Learning Factory resources, covering the full cost of both projects.

Beyond the technical advancements, McCracken valued the opportunity to mentor the Learning Factory students.

“PennTAP connected me to resources that provided opportunities I would never have found, including helping to find full funding for both projects,” he said.

Inspired by the collaboration, McCracken hopes to connect local high school students interested in engineering and related industries with organizations such as the Learning Factory.

With PennTAP’s guidance and the creativity of Penn State students, Stackable 3D Tic Tac Toe is poised to become a widely available tool that brings therapeutic benefits to patients needing physical therapy and educational value to learners.

Description of Impact on Entrepreneur:

PennTAP’s support provided funding, improved product development, and connected the entrepreneur with valuable resources and student collaboration opportunities. “PennTAP connected me to resources that provided opportunities I would never have found, including helping to find full funding for both projects,” Rich McCracken, 3D Tic Tac Toe LLC

Digital Foundry (New Kensington)

Company Assisted: ZOLL Medical Corporation

Business Address: 121 Gamma Drive, Pittsburgh, PA 15238

Contact: Rob Bilger, Vice President of Operations

Industry Focus: Development and marketing of medical devices and software solutions that advance emergency care and improve clinical and operational efficiencies

Demographic Profile: Not minority-, women- or veteran-owned

Company Offering:

ZOLL Medical Corporation provides products for defibrillation and monitoring, circulation and CPR feedback, data management, therapeutic temperature management, and ventilation—offering a comprehensive set of technologies for clinicians, EMS, and fire professionals.

Need for Support:

ZOLL sought to modernize its inspection process for critical components returning to their service center to improve quality assurance, reduce human error, and minimize labor demands. Their manual inspection process lacked consistency, scalability, and integration with digital quality reporting systems.

Assistance Provided: May 2024 – February 2025

The Penn State Digital Foundry at New Kensington (DFNK) partnered with ZOLL to develop an automated inspection proof-of-concept using a staged, de-risking approach:

- **Stage 1:** DFNK applied systems engineering and AI Vision technology to detect defects and anomalies at critical inspection points across multiple components. This prototype demonstrated automated inspection capabilities and integration with ZOLL's Manufacturing Execution System (MES) to digitally report results in real time.
- **Stage 2:** The solution expanded into a bench-scale pilot cell combining physical and digital automation: an industrial robot, AI vision system, HMI, PLC, KPI calculations, customized fixturing, and full MES integration. The system simulated reject/good part handling based on inspection outcomes.

DFNK applied commercially viable technologies from Technology Partners including Siemens, Inductive Automation, Keyence, and FANUC. Funding was supported through the Regional EDA Build Back Better Grant in partnership with the Advanced Robotics for Manufacturing (ARM) Institute.

Outcomes:

- Validated the technical and operational feasibility of automating inspection and reporting processes for multiple components.
- Enhanced product quality and operational efficiency.
- Created a scalable automation model for use across other operations within ZOLL.
- ZOLL received approval for capital investment to scale the solution into full production.
- Eight engineers received formal training at the Digital Foundry.
- Over 20 inspection line operators were introduced to the new technologies and upskilled.

Description of Impact on Entrepreneur:

ZOLL's collaboration with the Digital Foundry at New Kensington enabled them to realize a critical transformation in quality assurance processes. This technical advancement allowed them to make confident investment decisions, train and upskill employees, and enhance operational efficiency, ultimately contributing to business growth and product reliability.

OriginLabs (State College)

Company Assisted: Entertainment Buddy

Address: Carlisle, PA 17013

Contact: Fan Lin, Founder

Industry Focus: Assistive technology, medical devices for healthcare and eldercare

Demographic Profile: Women- and minority-owned

Company Offering:

Entertainment Buddy is an assistive phone holder with integrated wireless charging, designed for hospital beds, nursing homes, and wheelchairs to give patients reliable, hands-free access to their devices. Entertainment Buddy restores comfort, independence, and connection for patients during hospital stays or in long-term care.

Need for Support:

Lin was finding it difficult to transition Entertainment Buddy from an initial hospital-tested prototype sketch to a fully developed, manufacturable product. She was referred to OriginLabs by the Harrisburg LaunchBox for prototyping resources and technical guidance.

Assistance Provided: October 2024 to June 2025

Working with OriginLabs, Lin got hands-on help refining her design, focusing on maintaining a clean, user-friendly design that balanced functionality with visual appeal and meeting users' needs in form and function. OriginLabs tested different product materials and ultimately produced a 3D-printed prototype of the product.

Outcomes:

- Fully functional 3D-printed prototype of the Entertainment Buddy.
- Plans in progress to file a patent for the product.
- Exploring manufacturing options for large-scale production, with the goal of launching locally and expanding to hospitals and nursing homes nationwide.
- Goal to launch locally in Harrisburg.

Description of Impact on Entrepreneur:

“After all the ideas and sketches, seeing the prototype was a meaningful moment. Tristan’s hard work turned my vision into something real. It was the first time I felt that my goal to improve patient care and accessibility in healthcare could truly become a reality.”

Penn State Law Entrepreneur Assistance Clinic (EAC)

Company Assisted: Careers With Kate

Address: 2055 Mahantongo St., Pottsville, PA 17901

Contact: Kate Zimmerman, Founder

Industry Focus: Career Coaching and Consulting

Demographic Profile: Women-owned

Company Offering:

Careers With Kate helps individuals build confident careers one step at a time, offering guidance, practical advice, compassionate coaching, and proven, powerful tools that work.

Need for Support:

After a successful five-year career at Penn State Schuylkill, where she led the Cooperative Education (Co-Op) program and career services departments, Kate Zimmerman identified a critical need among Schuylkill County high school graduates who were unsure about their next steps—whether it be college, trade school, entrepreneurship, or workforce entry. Combining her educational background, mentorship skills, and passion for student success, she launched Careers With Kate to fill this gap.

Assistance Provided:

Kate was inspired to launch her business through Penn State Schuylkill's LionLaunch program. She connected with the Invent Penn State Law Entrepreneurship Assistance Clinic, which provided legal support for forming her LLC and developing essential client agreements. Additionally, she participated in LionLaunch workshops, including a Women Empowerment and Marketing Conference, to build foundational business knowledge and skills.

Outcomes:

- Official LLC formation
- Active coaching for five clients
- Leading workshops for volunteer career fairs
- Coaching at a local Financial Opportunity Center
- Teaching continuing education courses in the community
- Promoting services through networking, social media, testimonials, and referrals

Kate continues to grow Careers With Kate, leveraging the knowledge and connections gained through the Invent Penn State ecosystem to provide impactful career coaching services to individuals throughout her region.

Description of Impact on Entrepreneur:

"The Law Clinic was timely, efficient, and easy to work with. They helped me establish my LLC and created client agreements for me to use with my clients. It was such a great experience."

Abington LaunchBox powered by Penn State

Company Name: Orest Luzeckyj Artwork, Monsters on a Picnic

Address: Maplevale Dr., Yardley, PA 19067

Contact: Orest Luzeckyj

Industry Focus: Art, Woodcut printmaking

Demographic Profile: Not minority-, women- or veteran-owned

Company Offering:

The mission of Orest Luzeckyj's business is to create high-quality artworks that inspire creativity, enrich lives, and provide enjoyment for all. The products are original artworks created through the medium of woodcut printmaking, featuring unique monster designs that belong to a larger series. Each design is printed in limited, numbered small batches, and every print is signed and numbered by hand.

Need for Support:

Luzeckyj reached out to the Abington LaunchBox for help developing his business idea.

Assistance Provided: December 2024 to present

Abington LaunchBox initially assisted by informing and encouraging the entrepreneur to engage with several business idea competitions at Penn State University. Additionally, the entrepreneur was referred to the Penn State Law Intellectual Property Clinic for guidance on protecting the intellectual property and art used in the business. The Abington LaunchBox continues to review the entrepreneur's progress, consult on next steps, and suggest additional resources. The entrepreneur is regularly engaged with the mini maker space at the Abington LaunchBox to work on digitizing his designs, printing stickers, and making business cards.

Outcomes:

Luzeckyj continues to grow his business and his social media engagement. He is expanding his product line to include screen-printed t-shirts. His efforts were awarded with a second-place finish in both the Penn State Inc.U Competition and the Arts Business Idea Competitions in 2025.

- [2025 Arts Business Idea Competition Winners](#)
- [Invent Penn State Inc.U Competition Results](#)

Description of impact on entrepreneur(s):

"The Abington LaunchBox helped me to build a strong foundation," he says. "They also provided access to resources that helped my business to develop faster and stronger. Working with the people at the LaunchBox has also been impactful. LaunchBox student Jon Cunningham helped me with tools and software, and Peter Hornberger provided guidance and mentorship."

Altoona LaunchBox supported by the Hite Family

Company Assisted: HHG Drums LLC

Business Address: 166 Evergreen Road, Hollidaysburg, PA 16648

Contact: Sam Thurau, Founder

Industry Focus: Handmade musical instruments, retail

Demographic Profile: Not minority-, women- or veteran-owned

Company Offering:

HHG Drums is a boutique musical instrument manufacturer specializing in innovative, high-end, custom snare drums and drum sets crafted from Pennsylvania hardwoods.

Need for Support:

Despite a strong social media presence, HHG Drums identified a critical need to enhance its digital infrastructure. The company aimed to develop a more robust, user-friendly e-commerce platform and invest in brand awareness, optimize its sales funnel, and implement targeted conversion rate optimization (CRO) strategies to convert high-intent leads into loyal customers.

Assistance Provided: May 2023 – ongoing

Over the past two years, HHG Drums and owner Sam Thurau received multifaceted support through Penn State Altoona's academic partnerships and entrepreneurial initiatives:

- **Manufacturing PA Fellowship Program (May 2023):** In collaboration with the Penn State Altoona Innovation Factory staff, HHG was awarded a grant from the Manufacturing PA Fellowship Program that enabled electromechanical engineering students to automate a key part of the drum manufacturing process by developing a custom CNC milling machine. This innovation significantly improved production efficiency and product capabilities.
- **Sheetz Fellows Digital Marketing Project (September 2023 – April 2024):** A team of six Sheetz Fellows students from Penn State Altoona partnered with HHG to enhance its digital marketing strategy. They focused on creating engaging, trend-driven video content to grow the company's social media presence and drive brand awareness.
- **Craft It, Pitch It, Win It! Competition (April 2025):** HHG Drums was selected as a finalist in this annual competition. The company received pitch training, one-on-one counseling, and valuable feedback from judges. HHG's pitch included a plan for professional content creation, a brand awareness campaign, and website optimization. HHG won first place and received \$10,000 in funding.

Outcomes:

- 25% reduction in unit production time with 95% cut accuracy.
- Expanded product line to include larger bass drums and full acoustic drum sets.

- Increased production capacity, enabling simultaneous milling of multiple drums.
- Gained 20,000+ new Instagram followers and over 3.2 million combined social media engagements.
- Launched 14+ products on TikTok Shop.
- Awarded \$10,000 in funding to implement a strategic marketing plan.

Description of Impact on Entrepreneur:

“Working with Penn State-Altoona on this project [Manufacturing PA program] was a truly valuable experience for me and my company. As a team, we solved one of the core pain points for my business, and I gained a great deal of insight from the research team about how to tackle a large and complicated manufacturing problem.”

Description of Partners:

The Altoona LaunchBox supported by the Hite family partnered with the following local ecosystem members to assist HHG Drums with their needs:

- Penn State Altoona Sheetz Fellows Program
- Startup Alleghenies
- Blair County Alliance for Business & Economic Growth
- Penn State Altoona’s Electromechanical Engineering Program
- Innovation Factory at Penn State Altoona

Beaver Valley LaunchBox powered by Penn State Beaver

Company Assisted: Beaver County Events, LLC

Business Address: 2903 20th Street Extension, Beaver Falls, PA 15010

Contact: Nathan Goughnour, Owner

Industry Focus: Community event promotion and marketing support for local businesses

Demographic Profile: Not minority-, women-, or veteran-owned

Company Offering:

Beaver County Events (BCE) connects consumers with local events happening in their community while helping local businesses promote their events and reach target audiences.

Need for Support:

Although Nathan had built a 10,000-follower base on Facebook, he sought guidance to monetize that following, focus his efforts, define his product offerings, and create a sustainable, profitable business model.

Assistance Provided: January 2025 – Present (Ongoing)

BCE received tailored entrepreneurial support to help refocus and streamline business activities:

- Product Strategy Realignment:** Outlined current offerings and prioritized those with revenue-generating potential while phasing out activities that didn't contribute to monetization.
- Audience Engagement:** Continued building the 10K-strong consumer audience and directed traffic toward BCE's website featuring free event listings for local businesses, with potential for future ad revenue.
- B2B Services Development:** Mentored Nathan on Facebook advertising and boosted posts, positioning him to offer digital ad services to local businesses for a nominal fee.
- Customer Discovery & Value Proposition:** Guided the development of customer discovery questions and testing assumptions to better understand the needs of local advertisers.
- Newsletter Creation:** Helped launch a weekly local events newsletter to engage the audience and create a new advertising revenue stream.

Outcomes:

- Launched a weekly events newsletter that reached 1,500 subscribers in its first month
- Developed a clear elevator pitch for customer outreach
- Created a plan to engage directly with customers at Beaver County's major fair on June 7

Description of Impact on Entrepreneur:

"My time with the program has provided me with the opportunity to look at my business from a new perspective and ask myself questions not previously considered. The program has helped to refocus the goals I had set for my business and chart new directions as needs change. I look forward to the continued learning and progress as I grow my small business."

James R. Meehl Innovation Commons (Penn State Behrend)

Company Assisted: Babys Breath, LLC

Business Address: Pittsburgh, PA 15219

Contact: Amber Tamar Harris, Founder

Industry Focus: Pediatric oral health / infant healthcare products

Demographic Profile: Minority- and women-owned

Company Description:

Baby's Breath is developing a safe, simple, and effective device for oral hygiene preventative care in infants under six months old. Their flagship product, Gums N Brush, is a dual-component system including a toothbrush-like device and an organic, non-abrasive fluid designed to prevent oral thrush in newborns.

Need for Support:

As a first-time mother, Amber Harris was concerned by the lack of oral hygiene solutions for infants younger than six months, despite high rates of oral thrush in that population. Determined to create a solution, she envisioned a safe oral care routine for infants that was both preventative and practical. This vision required the development of both an applicator device and a safe oral fluid.

Assistance Provided: November 4, 2024 – May 30, 2025

The James R. Meehl Innovation Commons provided end-to-end product design and prototyping support for Baby's Breath. Amber worked closely with their team to create technical files, CAD drawings, and physical prototypes. She initially filed a provisional patent with assistance from the Penn State Law Intellectual Property Clinic based on the first prototype. After receiving feedback and conducting additional research, she worked with the Innovation Commons to significantly improve the product design, which has led to a second provisional patent filing.

Outcomes:

- First and second prototypes developed with design improvements between iterations
- Initial and second provisional patents filed
- Product is on track for full patent submission
- Connections made to testing resources through PennTAP and the Huck Institute
- Huck Institute researchers Dr. Camlia Kantor and Dr. Laura Weyrich facilitated a partnership with Dr. Scott Medina and student Logan Eisaman to conduct product testing
- Grant application in progress with PennTAP support for PA Manufacturing Innovation Grant

Amber plans to apply to accelerator programs, identify manufacturing partners, secure mentorship, and refine her business model to scale her innovative infant health product.

Description of Impact on Entrepreneur:

"I was amazed by all of the services I was able to receive from Penn State without upfront funding. The Innovation Commons team helped me bring an idea I had in my head to life with a real prototype. Their support, transparency, and dedication to my vision have been instrumental. I'm incredibly grateful for the progress I've made and excited for what comes next on this journey."

Description of Partners:

- PennTAP provided support in research, testing coordination, and grant opportunities.
- Penn State's Huck Institute of the Life Sciences offered safety and efficacy testing for the oral fluid formulation.
- Penn State Law Intellectual Property Clinic

Berks LaunchBox powered by Penn State

Company Assisted: Infuse AI Tech Corp (Brand: Agent23.AI)

Business: 401 Penn Street, Suite 141-P, Reading, PA 19601

Contacts: Munish Munagala (Founder & CEO), Himali Vaid (Co-Founder & Engineer)

Industry Focus: Customer service/support SAAS, AI

Demographic Profile: Minority-owned

Company Description:

Agent23.AI offers AI-powered Tier-1 customer service via web chat, phone, text, and email. Designed for small businesses and institutions in sectors such as HVAC and education, their bilingual (English-Spanish) voice agents automate scheduling, lead triage, follow-ups, and reminders. The platform responds in under 30 seconds, helping clients improve responsiveness and increase conversion rates.

Need for Support:

With early traction and a growing base of paying customers through AppSumo, Agent23.AI sought support to refine its business model, validate use cases, enhance pricing strategy, and build stronger enterprise connections. They turned to Berks LaunchBox for guidance and structured mentorship.

Assistance Provided: August 2024 – Present

The founders participated in the 6-week Idea TestLab accelerator, receiving structured customer discovery support, mentorship from 10 experienced startup coaches, weekly workshops, and pitch preparation. Post-program, they benefited from continued one-on-one advising, marketing brainstorming, patent research, and introductions to funding and enterprise contacts.

Outcomes:

- 1st Place Winner of Fall 2024 Idea TestLab Pitch Competition (\$1,000 prize)
- Launched live web chat and phone AI agents with enterprise clients
- Chester County Intermediate Unit adopted Agent23.AI's bilingual web chat agent
- Secured \$50,000 in funding from Ben Franklin Technology Partners of NE PA

- Achieved two LaunchBox grants: \$4,000 Imagine Your Business Grant and \$500 Coworking Grant
- Expanded team with a PSU marketing intern and contracted support
- Added 11 recurring monthly clients across PA in home services and SaaS sectors
- Reached nearly 100 customers via one-time sales through AppSumo
- Actively working toward SOC certification for enterprise compliance

Description of Impact on Entrepreneur:

"The Berks LaunchBox has been an incredible resource in my startup journey. From connecting me with key advisors and funding opportunities to providing hands-on mentoring and patent research support, their guidance has been invaluable. Through their network, I was introduced to Ben Franklin Partners of NE PA and given access to a \$4K grant opportunity, helping me take critical steps toward growth. Their support has truly made a difference in bringing my vision to life." - Munish Munagala

Description of Partners:

- Mentorship Network
- Ben Franklin Technology Partners of NE PA
- AppSumo (early launch platform)
- Alvernia O'Pake Center (office space)
- AWS Startups (Cloud Credits)
- NVIDIA Startups (GPU Credits)

Brandywine LaunchBox powered by Penn State

Company Assisted: Bottimals

Business Address: 600 N. 2nd Street, 4th Floor, Harrisburg, PA 17101

Contact: Julianne Gardner, Founder

Industry Focus: Infant care and feeding products

Demographic Profile: Women-owned

Company Description:

Bottimals is dedicated to helping mothers and infants navigate their feeding journey with less stress and more comfort. Their flagship product is a patent-pending bottle-lovey that incorporates a mother's scent—a scientifically backed method for soothing infants and encouraging feeding behavior. By combining emotional bonding with functionality, Bottimals transforms feeding time from a struggle to a comforting routine.

Need for Support:

As a mom of two young children and a newcomer to entrepreneurship, the founder needed support transitioning her idea into a business. At the early stages of product development and pre-revenue, she sought guidance on how to build confidence, publicly present her product, and move toward a successful product launch.

Assistance Provided: November 2024 – Present

The Brandywine LaunchBox provided support through mentoring for her first pitch competition, strategic business mentoring, and referrals to a patent attorney and fellow business mentors. This assistance played a crucial role in helping her navigate legal, branding, and developmental milestones as a new business owner.

Outcomes:

- Won first place in the Penn State Alumni category of the Lion Cage Pitch Competition.
- Used pitch competition award funds to hire a professional for logo creation, branding, and packaging design.
- Gained critical legal and business support through new patent attorney Chris Halliday, who revamped her patent strategy and supported broader business development.
- Built valuable mentorship connections, including a seasoned female entrepreneur for ongoing guidance.
- Successfully launched Bottimals in June 2025.

Description of Impact on Entrepreneur:

"When I first met the LaunchBox team, I was still in the early stages of product development and pre-revenue. Being a mom with two young kids and new to the world of business, I needed a lot of guidance. I met the LaunchBox team in November 2024 prior to the Lion Cage Pitch Competition. The team was incredible, giving me invaluable feedback to get my pitch off the ground and earn a winning spot in the Penn State Alumni category. At this point, I had not presented my business or product to the public due to fear of rejection and working in a space that was unknown to me (i.e., business). Since this pitch competition, I have 'full steam ahead' moved forward with my business through product development, branding, and now a successful launch in June 2025."

Description of Partners:

- Chris Halliday (Patent Attorney, Brandywine LaunchBox Advisory Board)

North Central PA LaunchBox powered by Penn State DuBois

Program Assisted: Industry 4.0 Academy

Organizer: North Central Pennsylvania (NCPA) LaunchBox powered by Penn State DuBois

Participants: Six high school seniors, DuBois Area School District

Industry Focus: K-12 education, advanced manufacturing

Demographic Profile: Rural Pennsylvania high school students

Program Description:

The Industry 4.0 Academy is a pioneering workforce development initiative preparing high school seniors for careers in advanced manufacturing and emerging technologies. Developed by the NCPA LaunchBox and Penn State DuBois, the program blends theoretical knowledge with immersive, hands-on experience in fields like robotics, automation, artificial intelligence (AI), and cybersecurity.

Need for Support:

Industries across Pennsylvania are rapidly integrating smart technologies, creating a critical demand for a skilled and future-ready workforce. However, a widening skills gap threatens to slow this progress. The Industry 4.0 Academy addresses this challenge by equipping students with essential technological competencies while fostering critical thinking and problem-solving skills necessary for modern industries.

Assistance Provided: 2024 – Present

The Academy provides structured, experiential learning over a series of nine-week modules. Students receive continuing education certificates as they progress through real-world simulations in robotics, cybersecurity defense, AI programming, and automation systems. Classes are held three times per week on campus, with additional exercises assigned remotely.

Outcomes:

- Six high school seniors completed the pilot cohort, gaining first-hand exposure to high-tech equipment and systems.
- Students earned continuing education credits and received foundational training in cybersecurity, robotics, AI, and automation.
- The Academy fostered critical thinking, teamwork, and innovation among students.
- Increased awareness among students of career opportunities in advanced manufacturing and technology.

- Plans are underway to expand the program to additional regional school districts.

The Academy aims to expand its reach, inviting students from additional school districts and further integrating real-world career pathways into its curriculum. Schools interested in future program installments are encouraged to contact Program Director Brad Lashinsky.

Description of Impact on Entrepreneurs & Partners

- "It has been refreshing to try something new while being provided hands-on, one-on-one instruction. The trust in our ability to learn these new technologies is unmatched." - Lillian Kakabadze
- "I've learned about the technology that affects my daily life, but I have never had the chance to gain hands-on experience with it." - Lucian Barnett
- "Before this program, I didn't realize how much of our world depends on cybersecurity. Every part of this program has provided information that I feel will be useful throughout my everyday life." - Clarence Mowrey
- "The partnership between Penn State DuBois and the North Central Pennsylvania LaunchBox represents an extraordinary investment in our students and the broader community. This initiative ensures our students are not just prepared for the future but are leading the way in shaping it." - Wendy Benton, Superintendent of the DuBois Area School District

Description of Partners:

- DuBois Area School District
- Applied AI Consortium

Fayette LaunchBox powered by Penn State

Company Assisted: Legacy of Hope Center

Business Address: 240 Eberly Way, Suite 125, Lemont Furnace, PA 15456

Contact: Marlella Thomas, Founder

Industry Focus: Social Services

Demographic Profile: Minority-owned

Company Description:

Legacy of Hope Center coordinates and connects support services with local social service agencies to assist disadvantaged or underserved women in overcoming obstacles and challenges to reach their personal goals.

Need for Support:

As a new nonprofit, Legacy of Hope Center lacked funds to rent workspace to assist clients and launch operations. The organization needed a safe, accessible meeting and office space to host seminars, events, and planning sessions to better serve women in the community.

Assistance Provided: April 1, 2025 – Present

The Fayette LaunchBox provided free office space with internet access, enabling Legacy of Hope Center to conduct business functions, plan events, and host guest speakers for women in the area. This support has been crucial in facilitating meetings with volunteers and clients to coordinate next steps and develop business plans.

Outcomes:

- Significant savings on operating costs
- Reliable internet access for business and client services
- Dedicated space to hold community events and seminars
- Financial and in-kind donations helping to establish a community footprint
- Direct client impact including job placement, bill payment assistance, childcare support, and help obtaining driver's licenses

Description of Impact on Entrepreneur:

"The Fayette LaunchBox has enabled me to fulfill the calling that God has directed me to do—helping women in need. It has allowed me to raise awareness of opportunities, provide guidance, and connect women to resources to break the cycle and live healthier lives. Personally, I have grown leaps and bounds—because when you know better, you can do better."

Description of Partners:

- St. Vincent DePaul
- Salvation Army
- Fayette County Community Action
- One Voice One Community
- Laurel Highlands School District guidance counselor
- HUD
- Dress for Success

Great Valley LaunchBox powered by Penn State

Company Assisted: KissUX

Business Address: 201 Washington St, Suite 105, Reading, PA 19601

Contacts: Vera Hempel & Kuba Kerner, Founders

Industry Focus: Real-time personalized assistance, protection, and guidance for internet browsing

Demographic Profile: Women-owned

Company Description:

KissUX provides users with real-time, personalized assistance and protection while browsing the internet, enhancing safety and user experience through innovative technology.

Need for Support:

The founders needed support refining their initial prototype, clarifying their value proposition, and navigating early-stage pivots to better align with market needs and investor expectations.

Assistance Provided: June 2024 – Present

The Great Valley LaunchBox team collaborated with KissUX through product development stages, helping clean up the initial prototype, fine-tune their value proposition, and manage multiple pivots. They also sponsored KissUX for a grant opportunity with Ben Franklin Technology Partners in the Lehigh Valley.

Outcomes:

- Improved product clarity and functionality through prototype refinement
- Gained strategic insights on market fit and business direction through mentoring
- Secured entry into the Ben Franklin Technology Partners portfolio, positioning them for future funding opportunities

Description of Impact on Entrepreneur:

“Penn State Great Valley LaunchBox connected us with a skilled graduate student who’s now a core part of our development team. Their support and mentorship around go-to-market strategy and software architecture played a meaningful role in shaping the foundation of KissUX.”

Mon Valley LaunchBox powered by Penn State Greater Allegheny

Company: Care Heart CPR, LLC

Business Address: 225 5th Ave., McKeesport, PA 15132

Contact: Shalay Williams, Founder

Industry Focus: Social Services

Demographic Profile: Minority- and women-owned

Company Description:

Care Heart CPR is an Authorized American Heart Association training site and Red Cross service provider. The company offers CPR, AED, and First Aid training for both adults and pediatric populations.

Need for Support:

Shalay Williams was inspired to start Care Heart CPR based on real-life incidents she witnessed as a healthcare professional. Her goals include fostering personal growth and sharing life-saving knowledge with her community.

Assistance Provided: June 2021 – Present

The Mon Valley LaunchBox provided three core resources: access to training space, business advice and guidance, and networking opportunities. These resources were key in supporting the business's ability to grow and serve the local community effectively.

Impact on Business:

Access to a professional and affordable training facility helped increase client trust and comfort, which is essential for CPR instruction. The support enabled Care Heart CPR to scale its services and broaden its reach.

Outcomes:

- More than 1,000 individuals trained in CPR, First Aid, and AED to date.
- Additional instructors trained and supported in launching their own CPR training businesses in other areas.
- Year-over-year increase in the number of students trained.

Description of Impact on Entrepreneur:

"Without LaunchBox, I do not believe I would have been able to make as much of an impact for myself or the community. To date, I've trained more than 1,000 people in CPR, First Aid, and AED. Also, I've had the opportunity to train other individuals to become instructors and start their own businesses in other areas. The greatest gift is when you receive a call from a student stating they had to perform CPR for the first time, and they felt confident. I strive to empower individuals with the knowledge to act in emergency situations. At Care Heart CPR we believe 'Every Heart Deserves a Second Chance.'"

Harrisburg LaunchBox powered by Penn State

Company Assisted: JoyTac LLC

Business Address: 200 Houck Dr, Apt G, Manheim, PA 17545-9813

Contact: Erin Godfrey, Founder

Industry Focus: Safety devices

Demographic profile: Women- and veteran-owned

Company Description:

JoyTac LLC offers an innovative retention holster device designed specifically for safety professionals, enhancing equipment security and usability in demanding environments.

Need for Support:

Erin sought guidance for customer discovery, developing a compelling pitch deck, refining her value proposition, and connecting with mentors and the innovation ecosystem to secure seed funding and startup resources.

Assistance Provided: September 2024 – Present

Erin engaged in the Veterans Business Bootcamp, received one-on-one coaching, and connected with mentors and local innovation resources. She also participated in pitch competitions and gained access to programs such as Invent Penn State IncU and Summer Founders, as well as potential prototyping support through OriginLabs.

Outcomes:

- New LLC formed
- Provisional patent secured
- Two founder jobs created
- Second-round prototype developed
- Growing interest from investors following over \$20K awarded in pitch competitions

Description of Impact on Entrepreneur:

"The Harrisburg LaunchBox supported us at a crucial moment with invaluable guidance through their Veteran Business Bootcamp, and their unwavering support has continued to carry us forward. They've created a welcoming space that brings together student entrepreneurs and local business leaders, fostering meaningful connections and collaboration. We're deeply grateful for their advice and the sense of belonging that has been key to our success."

Description of Partners:

- Rotary Veterans Initiative
- Ben Franklin Technology Partners
- Origin Labs

Hazleton LaunchBox powered by Pasco L. Schiavo, Esq.

Company Assisted: 10x Growth Alliance / Sahay Alliance

Business Address: Drums, PA

Contact: Jignesh Patel, Founder

Industry Focus: Leadership Coaching, Professional Development

Demographic Profile: Minority-owned

Company Description:

10x Growth Alliance empowers Product Managers, Agile Coaches, Scrum Masters, Technical Leads, and other professionals to unlock their leadership potential through intentional growth and self-management. The company facilitates connection, learning, and innovation across industries via mastermind groups, servant leadership coaching, and development programs. Core areas of focus include communication, trust, alignment, and sustainable growth.

Need for Support:

Jignesh sought to launch a leadership coaching business grounded in agile development principles. He needed support to validate the market, identify clients, and establish an operational foundation to grow his business effectively.

Assistance Provided: February 2025 – Present

The Hazleton LaunchBox assisted with customer discovery, marketing strategy, client identification, and branding. Jignesh also used the LaunchBox co-working space and podcast studio for content creation. The team provided strategic guidance and introduced him to partner organizations and business resources.

Outcomes:

- Company formally created and launched
- Completed a rebranding initiative
- Developed marketing content for YouTube and LinkedIn
- Building a local client base and planning to host small business leadership classes at the LaunchBox

Description of Impact on Entrepreneur:

"I wanted to start a leadership coaching business focused on the same concepts as agile development. The Hazleton LaunchBox worked with me on identifying a customer base and potential partnership organizations. Bill used his contacts to assist in the creation of a competitive analysis. The Hazleton LaunchBox is a professional facility and provides for office space, meeting space, and content development with their video and audio podcasting space."

Key Partners:

- Greater Hazleton Chamber of Commerce
- Small Business Development Center (SBDC)

Lehigh Valley LaunchBox powered by Penn State

Company Assisted: Spanish Immersion Learning Center

Contact: Dr. Nadia Alicia, Founder

Business Address: Shops at 3900 Hamilton Center, 207 Hamilton Boulevard, Allentown, PA 18103

Industry Focus: Early Childhood Education, Language Immersion

Demographic Profile: Minority- and women-owned

Company Description:

Spanish Immersion Learning Center provides an on-demand, all-Spanish class for children under 5. Designed for flexibility, the classes support both parents seeking educational enrichment at home and teachers incorporating Spanish instruction into early learning environments.

Need for Support:

Dr. Alicia recognized a significant need for early Spanish language education in Allentown, where 54% of the city's population are Spanish speakers. She sought support to raise awareness of this opportunity and expand her offerings during children's formative years (ages 3–5).

Assistance Provided: June 2024 – Present

Lehigh Valley LaunchBox supported Dr. Alicia through multiple pitch competitions and mentorship connections. She was the grand prize winner of the Second Annual LaunchBox Ladies Pitch Competition in June 2024, and later secured additional recognition as a Ben Franklin Technology Partner winner during the October 2024 Start Up Lehigh Valley Pitch Competition. Mentorship from Jonathan Epstein and LaunchBox Chair Bob Thomson helped refine her business plan and pitch.

Outcomes:

- Expanded offerings to include adult immersion education
- Nine staff members now featured on the Spanish Immersion website

- Gained confidence and skills to pitch to schools for program implementation
- Strengthened local presence and validated business concept through multiple pitch wins

Description of Impact on Entrepreneur:

"Although I hesitated to enter the competition because I felt overwhelmed, the encouragement of Lehigh Valley LaunchBox and the mentorship I received helped me articulate and refine my business concept. Winning the pitch competition for the Spanish virtual preschool idea boosted my confidence and led to further success at the Start Up Lehigh Valley Pitch Competition. I now have the confidence to have ongoing conversations with local schools about implementing our programming. These opportunities, resources, and exposure have accelerated my business development, and I am deeply grateful for the validation and support provided."

Dr. Alicia returned during the 2025 LaunchBox Ladies Pitch Competition to share her entrepreneurial journey and the impact of the pitch on her business. A recording of her remarks will be made available soon.

Description of Partners:

- LaunchBox Ladies Pitch Competition
- Start Up Lehigh Valley Pitch Competition
- Jonathan Epstein (LaunchBox Champion and Mentor)
- Robert Thomson (LaunchBox Chair and Mentor)

Mont Alto LaunchBox powered by Penn State

Company Name: Subcomponents Plus, LLC

Business Address: 475 Rich Valley Rd., Carlisle, PA 17015

Contact: Stephanie Lake, Founder

Industry Focus: Advanced Manufacturing

Demographic Profile: Women-owned

Company Description:

Subcomponents Plus uses advanced manufacturing technologies to provide small-run, short-lead time, high-precision parts and sub-assemblies that meet the stringent quality assurance needs of manufacturers.

Need for Support:

Stephanie identified critical supply chain gaps while working for a large multinational manufacturer but needed help narrowing her ideas into actionable steps. She lacked insight into the market potential outside her employer and how to access sales channels with other manufacturers. Later, as her business model and initial customer personas evolved, Stephanie sought ongoing support to refine her approach to niche markets and maintain focus as a full-time entrepreneur.

Assistance Provided: July 2024 – November 2024; May 2025 – Ongoing

Mont Alto LaunchBox staff supported Stephanie in refining her product and service offerings and coached her through foundational customer discovery. They facilitated key connections within the entrepreneurial ecosystem, including leaders in advanced manufacturing, workforce development, and startup investment: Joe Hackett (Ben Franklin Technology Partners), Tannisha Fuentes (Your Kingdom Workforce Services), Adam Marsh (Ledge, Inc.), Dustin Betz (White Rose Ventures), and Jay Jayamohan (Harrisburg University Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship).

Outcomes:

- Early support enabled Stephanie to gain clarity and momentum. She formed Subcomponents Plus, LLC and left her full-time job to become CEO.
- Stephanie joined Harrisburg University's CIE cohort (an equity-based accelerator), receiving her first equity investment and became a speaker at York LaunchBox and Ben Franklin Technology Partners' "Feed The Founders" event.
- In May 2025, she reengaged with LaunchBox to refine her customer discovery within targeted niche markets and to receive ongoing accountability and guidance as a solopreneur.
- Stephanie has since acquired equipment and begun generating MVP sales.

Impact on Entrepreneur:

"Working with LaunchBox gave me the structure and support to move from idea to execution. As a founder juggling family, work, and a startup, the guidance and accountability made a huge difference. I gained clarity on my business model and the confidence to speak with potential partners and customers. LaunchBox helped me take real steps toward building something sustainable."

Corner LaunchBox powered by Penn State (New Kensington)

Company Assisted: Spirit Foods

Business Address: 110 Drey St, Arnold, PA 15068

Contact: Twaina Williams, Founder

Industry Focus: Food Services and Catering

Demographic Profile: Minority- and women-owned

Company Description:

Spirit Foods prepares home-cooked style meals, offering “comforts that make you smile.” Services include individual meals, catering for events, and serving as the primary cook for the Arnold Fire Hall.

Need for Support:

When Twaina joined the Corner LaunchBox, her biggest challenge was finding access to affordable, convenient commercial kitchen space to legitimize and grow her catering business.

Assistance Provided: October 2024 – Present

Twaina participated in the Small Business Boost program from October 2024 through March 2025. This program provided foundational education and coaching for early-stage business owners. Since completing the program, she continues to meet regularly with business coach Joanna Sutton and participates in quarterly Community Connections networking sessions.

The Corner LaunchBox supported Twaina in evaluating options for kitchen access, ultimately helping her form a partnership with the Arnold Fire Hall. This allowed her to serve as their primary cook while using the kitchen for her own business. Additional support included pricing strategy and marketing refinement.

Twaina continues to receive ongoing support from the Corner LaunchBox, allowing her to pursue new catering opportunities and navigate her business journey with confidence.

Outcomes:

- Secured commercial kitchen access through strategic partnership
- Obtained all necessary licenses and permits to legitimize business operations
- Slowly expanded catering clientele
- Overcame challenges related to business viability and resource access

Description of Impact on Entrepreneur:

"There were moments when I nearly had to shut down my business due to lack of kitchen access and overwhelming operational challenges. The Corner LaunchBox helped me weigh my options and guided me toward a solution that fit my current needs. The ongoing business coaching and supportive community have been essential to helping me weather the ups and downs of entrepreneurship. They helped me fulfill my dream of launching and growing my catering business."

Descriptions of Partners:

- Arnold Fire Hall
- Small Business Boost Program
- Community Connections Networking Group

LionLaunch (Penn State Schuylkill innovation space)

Company Assisted: Careers With Kate

Business Address: 2055 Mahantongo St., Pottsville, PA 17901

Contact: Kate Zimmerman, Founder

Industry Focus: Career Coaching and Consulting

Demographic Profile: Women-owned

Company Description:

Careers With Kate helps individuals build confident careers one step at a time, offering guidance, practical advice, compassionate coaching, and proven, powerful tools that work.

Need for Support:

After a successful five-year career at Penn State Schuylkill, where she led the Cooperative Education (Co-Op) program and career services departments, Kate Zimmerman identified a critical need among Schuylkill County high school graduates who were unsure about their next steps—whether it be college, trade school, entrepreneurship, or workforce entry. Combining her educational background, mentorship skills, and passion for student success, she launched Careers With Kate to fill this gap.

Assistance Provided: January 2025 – Present

Kate was inspired to launch her business through Penn State Schuylkill's LionLaunch program. She connected with the Invent Penn State Law Entrepreneurship Assistance Clinic, which provided legal support for forming her LLC and developing essential client agreements. Additionally, she participated in LionLaunch workshops, including a Women Empowerment and Marketing Conference, to build foundational business knowledge and skills.

Outcomes:

- Official LLC formation
- Active coaching for five clients
- Leading workshops for volunteer career fairs
- Coaching at a local Financial Opportunity Center
- Teaching continuing education courses in the community
- Promoting services through networking, social media, testimonials, and referrals

Kate continues to grow Careers With Kate, leveraging the knowledge and connections gained through the Invent Penn State ecosystem to provide impactful career coaching services to individuals throughout her region.

Description of Impact on Entrepreneur:

"I can't thank the Invent Penn State and LionLaunch programs enough for helping me get my start! I have also enjoyed attending the local LionLaunch events to develop more skills in the areas of marketing and promoting my own business. I have had a wonderful experience with this process and can't wait to see what the future holds!"

Key Partners:

- Penn State Law Entrepreneurship Assistance Clinic
- Women Empowerment and Marketing Conference

Scranton LaunchBox powered by Penn State

Company Name: Restorative Limb Center

Business Address: 201 N Main Street, Plains, PA 18705

Contact: Gabriela M. Yurkanin, DPM, FACFAS; Founder

Industry Focus: Healthcare / Advanced Medical Services

Demographic Profile: Women-owned

Company Offering(s):

The Restorative Limb Center is a medical facility focused on advanced treatments for nerve pain and drop foot. Its services aim to improve mobility and quality of life for patients through specialized therapies such as hydrodissection and other neurologically focused procedures.

Motivation/Need for Support:

Dr. Yurkanin sought help developing a structured business plan for launching a second practice, specializing in nerve pain and drop foot treatment. Key challenges included identifying appropriate patient outreach strategies, analyzing service area demographics, building professional referral networks, and creating a clear execution plan.

Assistance Provided: February-May, 2025

Dr. Yurkanin collaborated with Christopher Hobbie, Scranton LaunchBox intern, to:

- Identify strategic marketing approaches tailored to the patient population for hydrodissection and nerve-related treatments;
- Analyze local demographic data to support location selection and service demand forecasting;
- Develop patient-focused messaging for educational materials such as blogs, testimonials, and social media content;
- Create a strategy for establishing professional referral pathways with physicians, podiatrists, and rehab centers;
- Contribute to the overall execution plan for launching the limb care center.

Outcomes:

In the course of working with the Scranton LaunchBox, Dr. Yurkanin developed a comprehensive business plan and execution strategy to support the launch of The Restorative Limb Center in Clarks Summit, PA.

Impact on Entrepreneur (in their own words):

"I would like to take a moment to recognize the tremendous support I've received from the Penn State LaunchBox initiative. Christopher's insight and dedication have been invaluable as I navigated market research, developed targeted outreach strategies, and explored patient education and referral networks."

Shenango LaunchBox powered by the Greater Sharon Community

Company Assisted: Premier Performances

Business Address: 40 S. Irvine Ave, Sharon, PA 16146

Contact: Joseph Spurio, Founder

Industry Focus: Music, Arts

Demographic Profile: Not minority, women- or veteran-owned

Company Description:

Premier Performances is a music studio focused on musical performance, educational outreach, and community enrichment. The studio offers private instruction, master classes, and support for local theater productions while building a network of subcontracted musicians to expand its impact.

Need for Support:

With a master's in choral conducting and a background in higher education, Joseph Spurio noticed declining tenure-track opportunities in collegiate music programs. Already active in the regional arts scene, he envisioned a studio that would empower students and musicians but lacked the business experience to start. He partnered with the Shenango LaunchBox to create a sustainable path forward.

Assistance Provided: April 2024 – Present

Joseph began by completing an intake form, which led to strategic discussions about service offerings and business planning. With guidance from the LaunchBox team, he:

- Defined a clear business vision
- Formed an LLC with legal support from the Entrepreneur Assistance Clinic
- Secured a lease with ACTS Performing Arts Center, where he now operates
- Received help in identifying liability insurance options
- Engaged with the Customer Discovery 101 curriculum and SBDC First Step training

Outcomes:

- LLC formation and lease secured at ACTS Performing Arts Center
- Ongoing partnerships with local educators and performance venues
- Hired 9 part-time subcontractor musicians
- Offers master classes, private instruction, and musical direction for regional productions
- Introduced advanced technology into local productions, such as Broadway-style orchestra tools

Joseph continues to pursue an intentional, growth-focused strategy, leveraging strong community ties and entrepreneurial mentorship to scale Premier Performances into a leading force in Western Pennsylvania's music and arts education sector.

Description of Impact on Entrepreneur:

"Starting an entrepreneurial journey can feel like an overwhelming undertaking with so many questions and unknowns; however, having the support and guidance of someone like Tom and the Shenango LaunchBox team has made all the difference in starting my business and feeling confident in doing so. I would highly recommend anyone who might be thinking of becoming an entrepreneur to seek out strong mentors like Tom and the ecosystem partners; it has made all the difference!"

Key Partners:

- Shenango LaunchBox powered by the Greater Sharon Community
- ACTS Performing Arts Center
- Penn State Law Entrepreneur Assistance Clinic
- Small Business Development Center (SBDC)

Happy Valley LaunchBox powered by PNC Bank (University Park)

Company Assisted: Atlas Biotech

Business Address: 200 Innovation Blvd, Suite 260A, State College, PA 16803

Contact: Joshua Reynolds, Founder

Industry Focus: Biotechnology – Oncology Drug Discovery & Screening

Demographic Profile: Not minority, women- or veteran-owned

Company Description:

Atlas Biotech is accelerating preclinical drug discovery through the development of proprietary screening platforms targeting diseases such as Chronic Myeloid Leukemia and Non-Small Cell Lung Carcinoma. The company's mission is to enable more effective and efficient therapeutics for patients.

Need for Support:

Founder Joshua Reynolds, a scientist with deep expertise in oncology, sought support to transition Atlas Biotech from lab research to commercial product development. He turned to Happy Valley LaunchBox to refine the company's business model, validate market demand, and pursue major funding opportunities including NIH and NSF grants.

Assistance Provided: Fall 2023 – Present

Joshua participated in several programs through LaunchBox, including:

- FastTrack Accelerator
- Summer Founders Program

- Startup Leadership Training

Support included:

- Business mentorship and expert-led workshops
- Pitch coaching and investor readiness
- Access to a 150+ member advisor network
- Legal guidance from the Entrepreneur Assistance Clinic
- Connections to Ben Franklin Technology Partners and Invent Penn State ecosystem

Outcomes:

- Secured \$2.755 million in non-dilutive funding:
 - \$100,000 from Ben Franklin Technology Partners
 - \$400,000 NCI Small Business Transition Grant (Phase I)
 - \$55,000 through NIH National I-Corps Program
 - \$2.2 million NIH award
- Completed NIH and NSF I-Corps programs
- Signed first biopharma contract (\$30,000 revenue, Q1 2025)
- Progressing toward commercial launch of oncology screening platform

Description of Impact on Entrepreneur:

"The Summer Founders Program was a fantastic experience where I was able to meet other founders, engage with successful entrepreneurs in the industry, and learn from experts in areas ranging from accounting to marketing to personnel management. Building a network of PSU (and PSU-adjacent) entrepreneurs and businesspeople has proven a true boon in moving my company forward. The advice and warnings provided by advisors and mentors have most definitely saved me pain, money, and time. The LaunchBox programming hasn't changed my ultimate goals—but it has absolutely informed the paths I take to reach them." — Joshua Reynolds, CEO, Atlas Biotech

Description of Partners:

- Ben Franklin Technology Partners
- Penn State Law Entrepreneur Assistance Clinic

Wilkes-Barre LaunchBox powered by Penn State

Program Assisted: Wilkes-Barre LaunchBox and Connect Partnership

Program Lead: Stephanie Gresh, Director, Wilkes-Barre LaunchBox

Location: Penn State Wilkes-Barre, 44 University Drive, Dallas, PA 18612

Industry Focus: Entrepreneurial Education and Support

Demographic Profile: College students and local entrepreneurs

Program Description:

Wilkes-Barre LaunchBox is a public university-affiliated initiative that supports entrepreneurs and students in Northeastern Pennsylvania through no-cost resources such as workshops, coaching, and business development programs. As a key driver of innovation at Penn State Wilkes-Barre, the LaunchBox builds entrepreneurial skills and fosters connections between the university and local business communities.

Need for Support:

Wilkes-Barre LaunchBox aimed to expand its regional impact by promoting student engagement in real-world entrepreneurial events. The goal was to strengthen community relationships, enhance experiential learning opportunities, and increase the visibility of LaunchBox as a hub for innovation and leadership development.

Assistance Provided: Spring 2025

Under the leadership of Stephanie Gresh, the LaunchBox collaborated with student Jada Vanderpool, a fourth-year business major and president of the Business and Entrepreneurial Club, to plan and execute a speed networking event during Penn State Startup Week. Gresh and LaunchBox staff provided mentorship and logistical support, while the club facilitated outreach to students and speakers.

This event connected students with local entrepreneurs and business professionals and was followed by a Spotlight Series presentation on advanced technology in the region. The initiative provided hands-on leadership experience for Vanderpool and showcased the impact of student-led programming on community engagement.

Outcomes:

- Expanded the LaunchBox's role as a connector between students and professionals
- Increased visibility for entrepreneurial programming at Penn State Wilkes-Barre
- Empowered student leaders through experiential learning and event management
- Strengthened community ties by engaging local businesses and entrepreneurs

Entrepreneurial Impact:

This case study underscores how Wilkes-Barre LaunchBox equips students to be active contributors in their local economy. By fostering real-world skill development in networking, leadership, and planning, the LaunchBox plays a pivotal role in preparing students for careers in business and innovation.

Strategic Impact:

The collaboration between the Wilkes-Barre LaunchBox, Penn State Wilkes-Barre, and regional partners such as the Greater Wyoming Valley Chamber of Commerce aligns with the DCED's mission of driving economic development through education and community engagement. The initiative continues to grow a vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem that connects academia, industry, and students in Northeastern Pennsylvania.

Description of Partners:

- Greater Wyoming Valley Chamber of Commerce: Co-sponsored the event via its Wilkes-Barre Connect program, helping attract local business leaders.
- Wilkes-Barre Connect: Promoted entrepreneurial opportunities by aligning regional resources and offering outreach support.

York LaunchBox powered by Penn State

Company Name: Beljan Consultation Services

Business Address: 7350 Carlisle Rd, Wellsville, PA 17365

Contact: Krista Beljan, Founder

Industry Focus: Management Consulting

Demographic Profile: Women-owned

Company Offering:

Beljan Consultation Services supports small manufacturers and businesses with under 50 employees by developing HR strategies that enhance employee retention and boost employer attractiveness. The company focuses on creating clear career development pathways within organizations.

Motivation/Need for Support:

Although Krista was highly experienced in management consulting through her work at a larger firm, she was uncertain about how to effectively target her specific niche as an independent entrepreneur. Encouraged by a fellow York LaunchBox client, Krista began meeting regularly with the LaunchBox for Customer Discovery 101 coaching, seeking structured accountability and guidance to move her vision forward during her off-hours.

Assistance Provided: February 3, 2025 – Ongoing

Krista participated in Customer Discovery 101 coaching sessions and regular accountability check-ins. These engagements helped her refine her understanding of target clients and better align her services with businesses most likely to benefit from them.

Outcomes:

- Krista evolved from a broad concept of consulting applicable to many small businesses to a more targeted focus on clients best positioned to implement and benefit from her strategies. This insight enabled her to avoid spending time on high-maintenance leads that were unlikely to result in successful engagements.
- Krista secured initial MVP (Minimum Viable Product) contracts as a sole proprietor.

Description of Impact on Entrepreneur:

"The expertise of LaunchBox in the topic of entrepreneurship and business planning have been beyond valuable because our discussions have provided me with perspectives that I would not have considered otherwise. Further, the way that Skyler organizes his approach, including various resources, thinking prompts, and high accountability throughout allowed me to stay on track with progress in planning for my business."