



LANSING REGIONAL
SmartZone

2025-26 IMPACT REPORT

LEVERAGING SMART MOMENTUM

Accelerating High-Tech,
High-Growth Companies in the 517



LEVERAGING SMART MOMENTUM

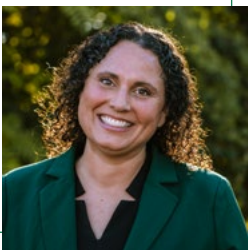
Our SmartZone has existed 21 years, funded by a TIF tax capture that took years to build. During our first decade, we didn't have the funding needed for the programming, staff, or services to help the businesses we hoped to start and grow here. The SmartZone designation existed; the capacity to use it did not.

The capacity gap has closed, and the last several years have shown what real momentum looks like. For every dollar of tax capture invested in supporting local high-growth companies, those companies go on to secure many times that amount in outside investment, grants, and follow-on funding. In 2022, \$479,000 in tax capture helped our companies secure \$4.7 million in additional funding, roughly a **10-to-1 return**. By 2026, \$857,347 helped leverage \$17.5 million, more than **20 times the invested amount**. That return is not just about capital: founders get coordinated support across the region, including benefits from a strong partnership with the MSU Research Foundation to the regional programs and funding available through LEAP.

These returns translate into real success. One of our companies went from the lowest-rated pitch in a student competition to securing a patent and landing a deal on Shark Tank. Another followed last year's MSU Innovation of the Year award with a \$1.55 million SBIR to bring its patient safety device closer to market.

Momentum like this doesn't happen by accident. The State of Michigan has funded the SmartZone program for 25 years. Without renewed legislation, the staff, space, and programming behind everything in this report become far harder to sustain. We're optimistic about what continued state support could mean, and we intend to keep building on it, because that's what 21 years of perseverance has taught us to do.

Leaning into the momentum,



Jillian Winn
Director



Abbie Tykocki
Board Chair

PROGRAM STAFF

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SmartZone Director

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VP of Entrepreneurship & Innovation

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Jessica Vilca
VP of Marketing & Communications

Tony Willis
Chief Equity Development Officer

MANAGED BY



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FY 2025-2026 JOINT LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FINANCE AUTHORITY BOARD

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- **Benjamin Bakken (Vice Chair)**,
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- * **Traci Riehl (Treasurer)**, City of Lansing
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(Appt. 1/20/2026)
- **Charles Hasemann**, City of East Lansing (MSU)
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- Jon Laing**, Lansing School District
- Shay Manawar**, City of Lansing (Appt. 12/15/2025)
- Mark Meadows**, City of East Lansing
- Nicole Millsap**, Lansing School District
- Christian Palasty**, East Lansing Public Schools
- **Heather Pope**, City of East Lansing
(Appt. 2/17/2026)
- Jill Rhode**, City of East Lansing (Through 2/17/2026)
- * ◦ **David Washburn**, City of Lansing
(MSU Research Foundation)

ADDITIONAL COMMITTEE MEMBERS

- **Jeff Smith**, MSU Research Foundation
- **Gabriela Strom**, MSU Research Foundation

* Program Committee Members

◦ Real Estate Advisory Committee Members

KEY STATS



22 new companies created



139 companies supported
through SmartZone
services (63% diverse)



\$17.5 M in private and
public funds raised



54 events hosted or
sponsored



2,700+ attendees at
hosted and sponsored
events



2,936 client touchpoints



36 TIC incubator tenants
(with 85 employees)



47 new jobs created

INNOVATION IN ACTION: FEATURED COMPANIES

By infusing the pipeline from idea to launch with supportive services and resources, our targeted momentum supported **139 companies in fiscal year 2026**.

The SmartZone supports startups across a wide range of industries. Software remains our largest sector, reflecting demand for AI-enabled solutions, while a growing share of this year's companies are pushing patented, physical products toward manufacturing, a hard-tech trend the SmartZone is excited to support.

The SmartZone supports local companies to ensure they stay in the region. These companies primarily come from three sources: intellectual property (IP) licensed out of Michigan State University, MSU student entrepreneurs building businesses of their own, and local founders solving problems close to home. Together, MSU-connected founders and licensed IP make up 37% of our companies.

We're creating the alchemy that combines initiative, grit, resources, and a desire to solve problems into real companies that create jobs, scale, and deliver a big impact.

Business Focus/Type



Software



Physical Product



MSU IP



MSU Student Venture

LYM DESIGNS



Health care executive Kris McCarty invented the [Beverage Pantry](#), allowing workers in health care, manufacturing, and food service to stay hydrated on shift while supporting workplace compliance. The product is manufactured and assembled in the United States.

iCATCH



[iCatch](#) is an AI-powered app that identifies fish species from a photo and accompanying 30-second diagnostic swab when needed. It's helping authorities enforce against illegal fishing. Co-founded by Mariah Meek and Nadya Mamoozadeh, it was one of just seven startups selected for a NOAA-funded BlueTech Accelerator.

SIT SENSE



[Sit Sense](#) uses patented technology in its medical recliner to automatically adjust patients, reducing bedsores. The company won last year's Innovation of the Year Award from the MSU Innovation Center, and recently earned a \$1.55 million SBIR award.

"All the support from the SmartZone has been really great, especially as we've been in the process of raising funds."

- Justin Scott, Co-Founder



FULL CYCLE LOGISTICS



Full Cycle Logistics streamlines route logistics and is a great example of how solving a problem for your own company can launch an entirely new one, and how non-tech companies can evolve into the tech space.

Founder Mike Dombrowski built an internal tool to manage increasingly complicated logistics for his composting business, bringing his business full cycle.

PACIFIC PARKWAY PRODUCTIONS



Hairstylist Stefaney Norcross invented the Infinity Shampoo Bowl to create a more ergonomic experience for stylists and more comfort for clients.



BRCE



MSU student entrepreneurs, Madhav Aggarwal and Tanvi Gadamsetti, designed a patented shoelace that does not come untied. Two years after launch, they landed a two-Shark deal on Shark Tank! BRCE has racked up hundreds of thousands of dollars in sales and won several pitch competitions.

“SmartZone-backed funding directly enabled us to file and secure our patent, which was later recognized by the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office as a top five undergraduate invention nationwide.”

- Madhav Aggarwal and Tanvi Gadamsetti, Co-Founders



INTERNATIONAL COMPANIES

The SmartZone is a soft landing spot for international companies entering the U.S. market. This year Ecourage joined the Technology Innovation Center. The company builds refilling machines with smart technology and has already secured pilots in its home country of the Netherlands, as well as France, Italy, New Zealand, Japan, and the U.S. With our support, a pilot machine is being activated in our region.



FUELING GROWTH: RESOURCES

The SmartZone is a resource hub for founders and entrepreneurs – a launchpad that provides workspace, mentorship, funding connections, and a supportive ecosystem to transform ideas into sustainable, growing businesses.

INCUBATOR SPACE

The [Technology Innovation Center \(TIC\)](#) is the SmartZone-sponsored incubator for tech startups in East Lansing. The TIC and Alliance Incubator in Lansing are managed by the MSU Research Foundation.

36 TIC Companies (16 physical; 20 virtual) | **85 TIC Employees**
8 Alliance Companies | **83 Alliance Employees**

PROGRAMMING

The **Venture Creation/Community Mentor in Residence Program** helps founders with a working proof-of-concept transform innovative technology into scalable, investable businesses. Managed by the MSU Research Foundation, participants receive customized support, mentorship, expert feedback, and curated introductions to service providers, industry specialists, and strategic partners.

\$356,950 total funding (\$331,950 public; \$25,000 private) | **48 clients served** (62% diverse) | **65 jobs created** | **25 new client companies created** | **15 community partners engaged** | **48 referrals** | **5 clients attracted from outside the region** | **15 retained in region**

The **Conquer Accelerator Program** provides mentorship, strategic connections, capital readiness support, and commercialization guidance to help entrepreneurs validate markets, access funding, and build sustainable companies that create economic impact. The **CADE Program** pairs MSU interns to support each team. This program is managed by the MSU Research Foundation.

\$300,000 total funding (\$100,000 Public; \$200,000 Private) | **5 companies served** (80% diverse) | **4 jobs created** | **5 interns** | **2 retained in the region**

Business Made Simple is a series of free, one-hour workshops focusing on tech tools for small business owners. Over 80% said they felt more confident about their next business step after attending. This program is managed by LEAP.

175 attendees | **11 sessions** | **9 local experts**

The **Capital Area Startup Studio** is an 8-month cohort-based incubator that helps early-stage founders turn ideas into real, tech-enabled businesses. Through training in AI and low-code/no-code tools alongside hands-on mentorship, founders get the community and support to design, build, and launch their MVP. Operated by Gravity Works Design and Boost, this is the second year of the program. The cohort included Troubleshot, Sound Birthing, Blueprint of Beauty, Campus Connect, Letta, and Memory Sketch.

Amirika Richardson, a 2025 cohort participant of the Capital Area Startup Studio, reported that they have since expanded staff, profits, and office space.

\$21,500 in public funding | 8 clients served (62% diverse) | 9 public events | 127 event attendees

The **Apple Community Education Initiative Youth Coding Academy** gives youth hands-on coding, media, robotics, AI, and creative technology experience to spark interest in future tech careers. This program is managed by MSU Extension and Michigan 4-H in Ingham County.

566 students | 17 programs | 72 days of programming | 12 locations | 12 community partners engaged

The **Impression 5 L.A.B.S. and STEM/STEAM Programs** deliver STEM education and concept exploration to children ages 5-14 to hone their STEM skills. This program is managed by Impression 5 Science Center.

810 students | 4 programs | 33 days of programming

GRANTS

Access to capital is a key lever to success. The SmartZone supports growth-minded businesses through non-dilutive, direct funding. In fiscal year 2026, the SmartZone distributed:

\$597,208

Total grant funds:
**65 awards to
47 companies**

\$108,427

Local Accelerator
Fund (LAF):
**17 awards to
16 companies**

\$205,585

Business
Accelerator Fund
(BAF): **12 awards to
11 companies**

\$186,211

TREK Accelerator
Funds (TAF):
**25 awards to
23 companies**

\$96,985

Direct TREK
Accelerator Funds
(DTAF): **11 awards
to 11 companies**

517 ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND INNOVATION WEEK

The SmartZone and LEAP hosted the second annual **517 Entrepreneurship and Innovation (E&I) Week**, a community-driven celebration of the region's entrepreneurship and innovation. Twenty-four organizing partners came together for 28 events over 5 days, drawing 2,049 attendees. E&I Week helps founders to build their companies here, and gives the broader community a visible, accessible way to engage with the region's entrepreneurial energy. Many thanks to event sponsors MEDC, Lansing BWL, Lake Trust, and Foster Swift Collins & Smith.



COMMUNITY EVENTS

The SmartZone supports **events** that foster connection and momentum. These opportunities allow founders to share their stories, expertise, and products; connect with mentors and subject-matter experts; showcase their ideas at demo nights; and cheer each other on.

28 events hosted | 26 events sponsored | 78 events with SmartZone staff | 546 total attendance at SmartZone-hosted events | 2,700+ total attendance at hosted & sponsored events

INNOVATE WITH US!



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PROGRAM PARTNERS

The SmartZone connects entrepreneurs to the right resources in the entrepreneurial ecosystem at the right time. To facilitate effective referrals, we provide warm introductions to our invaluable partners, who help to strengthen innovation, attract talent, and drive inclusive regional economic growth:

MSU Research Foundation	MEDC	MSU Extension	Michigan 4-H in Ingham County
MSU Burgess Institute	SBDC	Gravity Works Design	Lansing Economic Development Corporation
MSU Innovation Center	Lansing 5:01	Boost	
Impression 5 Science Center	Lansing Codes	Lansing BWL	
Foster Swift Collins & Smith	MITN Lansing	Lake Trust Credit Union	



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