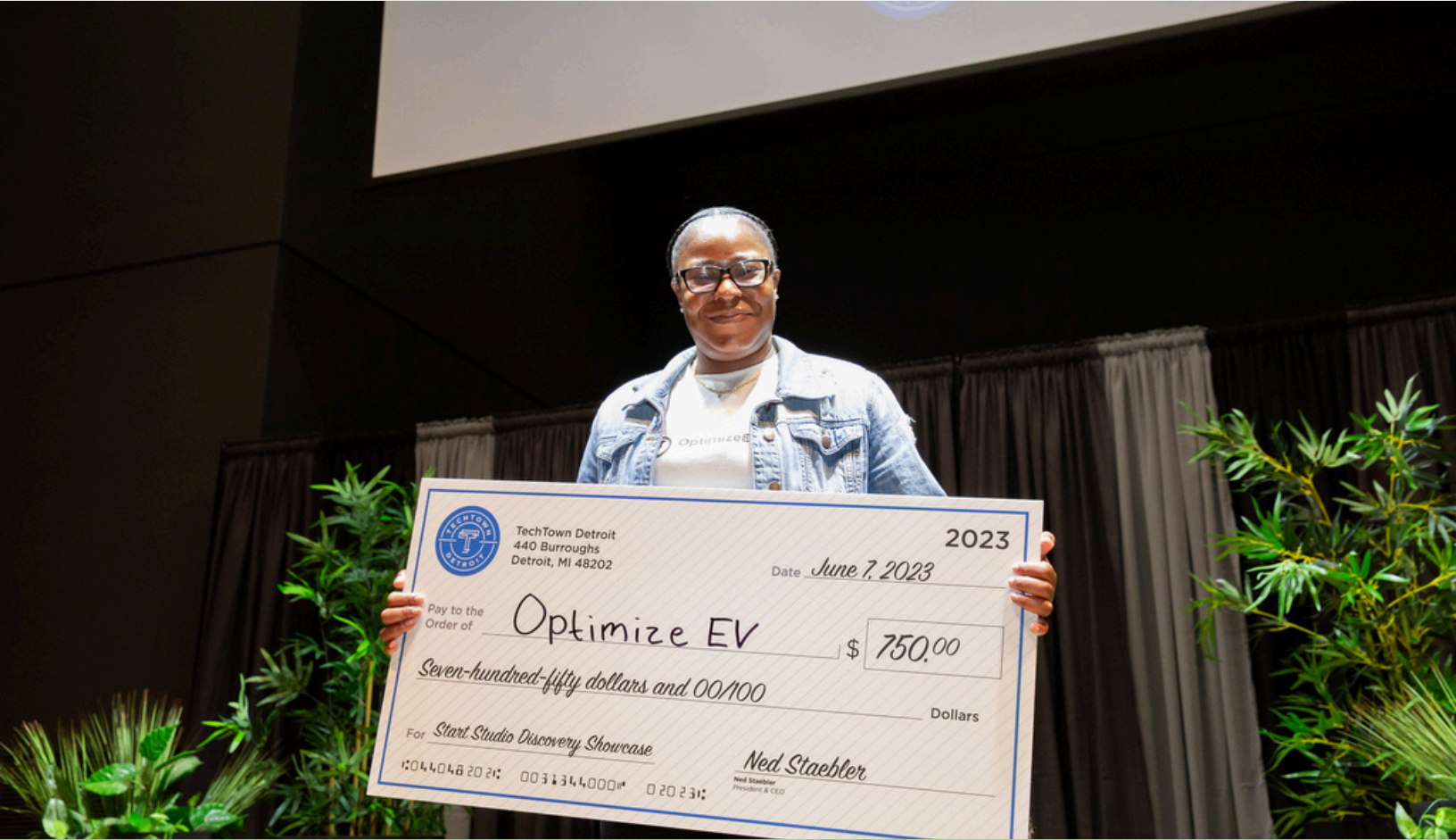




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WAYNE STATE
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CECE

INNOVATION AND ECONOMIC PROSPERITY AWARDS PROGRAM

2024
CASE
STUDY

IEP CATEGORY - INNOVATION

Wayne State University

Accelerating the growth of advanced mobility startups in Southeast Michigan

TECHTOWN'S MOBILITY ACCELERATOR INNOVATION NETWORK (MAIN)

TechTown — Wayne State University's entrepreneurship hub — launched the Mobility Accelerator Innovation Network (MAIN) in 2022 to accelerate the growth of mobility startups in Southeast Michigan. To date, MAIN has served over 200 companies, which have obtained 86 patents, drawn \$206 million in venture capital, and commercialized six products.

MAIN is one of six components of the Global Epicenter of Mobility (GEM) initiative. GEM is a collaboration led by the Detroit Regional Partnership designed to accelerate economic growth by building on our region's mobility assets. GEM is creating a smart, secure, sustainable, and inclusive advanced-mobility industry, starting with the transition to next-generation electric, autonomous, and fully connected vehicles. It is funded by a \$52.2 U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) Build Back Better Regional Challenge (BBBRC) grant — one of the largest BBBRC grants awarded by the EDA.



Mobility Accelerator Innovation Network (MAIN) and GEM partners tabling at Drinks X Design in April 2024

TechTown received \$12.4 million of the \$52.2 million to launch MAIN. A well-established incubator and accelerator with a deep connection to the only R-1 research university in Detroit, the Motor City, TechTown was an obvious choice to lead MAIN. It has seven partners in this effort:

1. Design Core Detroit at the College for Creative Studies
2. Wayne State
3. University of Michigan
4. Endeavor Detroit
5. Centrepolis Accelerator at Lawrence Tech University



6. Michigan Founders Fund
7. Invest Detroit.

ABOUT OUR PARTNERS IN MAIN

Wayne State and the University of Michigan are working to commercialize research-based technology, assisting with the identification, protection, marketing, and licensing of intellectual property. Design Core provides insights on design trends in mobility and elevates the visibility of mobility companies through events that highlight brilliant design and future concepts. Endeavor specializes in high-growth tech and provides customized support services to entrepreneurs leading high-growth companies. The Centrepolis Accelerator is focused on hardware technology and provides entrepreneurs with access to essential resources including mentors and prospective corporate partners. The Michigan Founders Fund connects founders to resources and to one another through a founder-to-founder support network. Invest Detroit Ventures is the venture funding partner of MAIN. They help scale promising early-stage startups into thriving companies.

WHAT MAKES US DIFFERENT

GEM defines advanced mobility as the multi-dimensional movement of people or goods and the products, materials, processes, and technologies that support it. This definition is broader than most definitions of mobility, allowing more people to participate in and benefit from this initiative. GEM is also intentional about serving historically excluded communities, including Black founders, women, veterans, and rural communities. The GEM team includes a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice Officer and all of the sub-awardees are participating in Equity Sequence® workshops to ensure we are doing what we set out to do: support the many diverse communities that make up the Detroit region.

HOW MAIN WORKS

MAIN's role is to streamline the existing resources available to mobility entrepreneurs in Southeast Michigan, making it easier for them to navigate these resources, and to identify and fill gaps.

The team started by creating a quality map for mobility entrepreneurs, identifying regional assets that optimally serve mobility founders, and growing a strong understanding of the appropriateness of each offering based on the companies' stage of development, the nature of their idea, and



product/process readiness. It then employed a tool called Starting Point to aggregate these resources and make them searchable. Starting Point will also point entrepreneurs to MAIN partners and other entrepreneurial supports based on their Technology Readiness Level (TRL), the state of their product, and revenue.

The team identified access to capital as a significant challenge, especially for the historically excluded communities that MAIN is committed to serving, so it formed the Michigan Mobility Fund Network. The Network is comprised of Invest Detroit Ventures (a MAIN partner), Michigan Rise (a partnership between the Michigan Economic Development Corporation and Michigan State University Research Foundation), and Spartan Innovations (a program of the Michigan State University Innovation Hub). It helps startups access capital by engaging venture capital firms and various angel networks while also supporting entrepreneurs through education on venture capital readiness. To date, MAIN companies have received more than \$200 million in venture capital and nearly \$20 million in other investments.

MAIN is also working to ensure that mobility entrepreneurs and companies have access to an array of opportunities that support their connection to the community. The MAIN team has been doing outreach through large events like the North American International Auto Show and partnerships with youth entrepreneurship organizations like Youthtank Detroit. They also took four mobility founders to South by Southwest (SXSW) in Austin, Texas in 2024. And in May 2024, MAIN launched a series of workshops delivered in Spanish in partnership with the longstanding community-based Southwest Detroit Business Association.

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE NETWORK

Founded by Wayne State alumna Brittany McGee, OptimizeEV is a Detroit-based startup that seeks to optimize the EV charging experience through predictive monitoring and maintenance. This predictive monitoring system helps identify potential issues and threats before they lead to downtime. OptimizeEV's innovative approach to EV charging infrastructure could have a substantial impact on the EV industry by improving the reliability and efficiency of charging stations, making electric vehicles more accessible and convenient for users.

Brittany gained access to the MAIN network through TechTown's Start Studio Discovery and MVP programs, which help entrepreneurs validate early-state ideas through customer discovery



interviews and create revenue-generating minimum viable products. As a mobility founder, Brittany was also connected with one of the four mobility entrepreneurs-in-residence housed at TechTown — positions funded by the MAIN grant.

In October 2023, Brittany was included on the Renaissance Venture Capital Fall 2023 Startup Hotlist, which features promising early-stage Michigan-based companies curated from hundreds of recommendations. Brittany is now part of Techstars Detroit Powered by J.P. Morgan, an accelerator designed to recruit and provide equitable access, funding, and support for entrepreneurs of color. She is also validating her technology at Newlab Detroit in the Michigan Central mobility innovation district — a connection she made through MAIN.



LINKS TO FURTHER INFORMATION

Supporting Information:

- [Mobility Accelerator Innovation Network \(MAIN\)](#)
- [Global Epicenter of Mobility \(GEM\)](#)
- [Economic Development Administration \(EDA\) Build Back Better Regional Challenge](#)

MAIN Partners:

- [Wayne State University](#)
- [Design Core Detroit](#)
- [Endeavor Detroit](#)
- [Centrepolis Accelerator at Lawrence Technological University](#)
- [Michigan Founders Fund](#)
- [University of Michigan](#)
- [Invest Detroit](#)



ABOUT APLU

The Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) is North America's oldest higher education association. APLU is a research, policy, and advocacy organization dedicated to strengthening and advancing the work of public universities in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico. The association's membership consists of public research universities, land-grant institutions, state university systems, and affiliated organizations.

APLU's mission is to expand access and improve student success to deliver the innovative workforce of tomorrow; advance and promote research and discovery to improve society, foster economic growth, and address global challenges; and build healthy, prosperous, equitable, and vibrant communities locally and globally.

Based in Washington, DC, the association's work is furthered by an active and effective advocacy arm that works with Congress and the administration as well as the media to advance federal policies that strengthen public universities and benefit the students they serve.

ABOUT THE IEP PROGRAM

APLU and its [Commission on Economic and Community Engagement \(CECE\)](#) established the Innovation and Economic Prosperity (IEP) Program to help higher education institutions codify, elevate, and advance their campus enterprise supporting economic and community development.

The **IEP Program** recognizes institutions that have demonstrated a meaningful, ongoing and substantial commitment to economic and community development, growth, and economic opportunity.

The **IEP Awards Program** recognize exemplary and innovative projects in university-based economic and community engagement:

- Talent and workforce development
- Innovation, entrepreneurship, and tech-based economic development
- Place development through public service, outreach, and community engagement

Learn more at: www.APLU.org/IEP

