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Regional talent moves innovation from lab to line.
Photo courtesy of iFAB.

How Regional Innovation Strategies Take Shape

Lessons from Four Coalitions Pursuing Federal Investment

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KC BioHub

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Executive Summary



This paper follows four regional coalitions, Minnesota MedTech (The Greater Minneapolis-St. Paul and Rochester area), Sustainable Polymers (Akron), iFAB (Central Illinois), and KC BioHub (Kansas City), through interviews with each coalition leader, from their 2023 Tech Hubs designation through the program's July 2026 implementation round.

Across the four cases, coalitions organized around commercialization bottlenecks and built governance structures to address them. Minnesota MedTech and KC BioHub also described adjusting their public framing as federal priorities shifted.

Coalition leaders interviewed for this paper

Outcomes have diverged for the leaders and the regions in this paper. Two were funded in 2024; one received notice of an intended award in 2026; and one has not yet been selected. This paper treats those outcomes as data points, not verdicts on strategy quality.

Jim Southwick

Managing Director, MedTech, GREATER MSP
Medical technology • AI-enabled health data

COALITION ROLE

Leads coalition coordination for GREATER MSP

Hans Dorfi

*Executive Director & Chief Innovation Officer,
Polymer Industry Cluster*
Sustainable polymers

COALITION ROLE

Hub's formal leader since the Tech Hub award

Beth Conerty

Regional Innovation Officer, iFAB Tech Hub
Precision fermentation • biomanufacturing

COALITION ROLE

Founding officer; helps manage the Integrated Bioprocessing Research Laboratory

Melissa Roberts Chapman

President & Regional Innovation Officer, KC BioHub
Biologics development, testing & manufacturing

COALITION ROLE

Leads grant strategy; SURGE Advisory Board member

Introduction

Regional innovation competitiveness depends on helping technologies move from research toward market use, and framing that transition in a way that can secure public investment. The “valley of death” suggests that promising technologies often face their greatest challenge after the research stage, when technical potential still requires proof that the idea can work beyond the lab (Auerswald and Branscomb, 2003). Framing helps explain how coalitions make that gap fundable by showing why the problem matters, why the region can address it, and why the intervention fits broader public priorities (Benford & Snow, 2000).

Across the four cases examined in this paper, coalitions identified a specific commercialization bottleneck to coordinate around and framed the proposed intervention as a direct response to national priorities. These cases show how coalitions developed a clearer understanding of their region’s strengths, the commercialization barriers they faced, and the role federal investment could play in addressing them.

What makes regional innovation coalitions more competitive for funding as they turn regional assets into a strategy to pursue federal investment?

What each case adds

The commercialization gap each coalition targeted, and the pattern its case illustrates

Minnesota MedTech COMMERCIALIZATION GAP Access to clinical data for testing and validating AI-enabled medical technologies	WHAT THE CASE ADDS Regional strength still requires coordination and a clear story that makes distributed assets visible to funders, companies, and talent.
Sustainable Polymers COMMERCIALIZATION GAP Pilot-scale capacity between laboratory research and industrial production	WHAT THE CASE ADDS Legacy manufacturing infrastructure can support new technologies when a coalition organizes it around a specific scale-up gap.
iFAB COMMERCIALIZATION GAP Pilot and demonstration capacity for precision fermentation	WHAT THE CASE ADDS A stable leadership team can connect agricultural assets, university infrastructure, and industry needs around a concrete commercialization pathway.
KC BioHub COMMERCIALIZATION GAP Preclinical testing, development, and manufacturing capacity for biologics	WHAT THE CASE ADDS A region can strengthen its strategy by defining how it complements major discovery centers instead of trying to replicate them.

Minnesota MedTech Case Study

Interview with Jim Southwick, Managing Director of MedTech at the Minneapolis Saint Paul Regional Economic Development Partnership (GREATER MSP)



Minnesota MedTech, based in the Greater Minneapolis-Saint Paul and Rochester region, includes Medtronic, Mayo Clinic, the University of Minnesota, and the Medical Alley Association. The hub received its initial Tech Hub designation in October 2023, when federal priorities focused heavily on domestic medical supply chains and post-pandemic health security. For the late-2025 implementation funding round, the hub selected and presented specific projects within a changed political environment. Minnesota MedTech was not among the six Tech Hubs selected for implementation funding announced in July 2026.

Governance Structure

Minnesota MedTech is one of several parallel innovation hubs that GREATER MSP has organized this way, alongside coalitions like the food and agriculture hub MBOLD. Southwick describes the structure as three concentric circles radiating out from an executive core, rather than a top-down hierarchy. At the core is a single circle combining a CEO-level council, which functions as a board of directors with strategic oversight, and a “deputies” group of senior leaders such as Chiefs of Staff who handle day-to-day coordination. The CEO-level council includes leaders from major regional institutions:

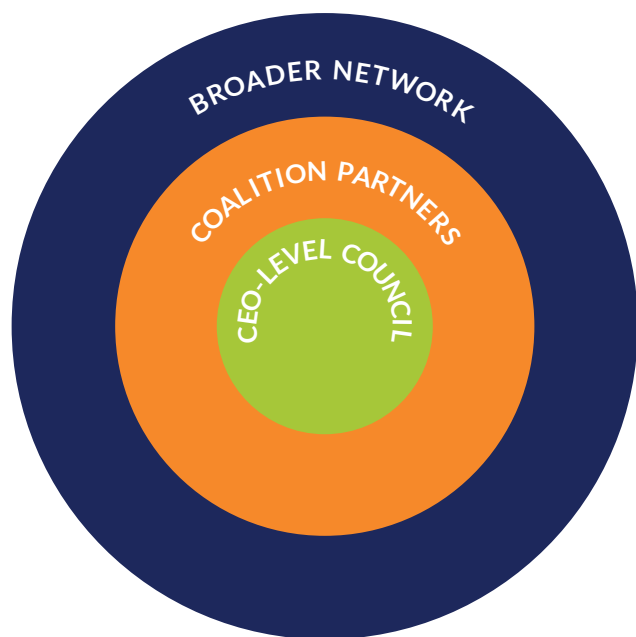


MedTech hub leaders at the Philips expansion announcement in Minnesota. Photo courtesy of GREATER MSP.

- The University of Minnesota
- Mayo Clinic
- Medtronic
- HealthPartners
- Destination Medical Center
- Solventum
- Medical Alley
- Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development

The next circle out includes a broader coalition of organizational partners. This circle includes medtech companies, health systems, universities, venture capital firms, and government agencies that are committed to one or more of MedTech's strategic priorities. Each coalition member has a primary representative who coordinates engagement from additional experts on specific projects, similar to how a deputy supports their board member. These partners develop initiatives once the broader direction is set, though they can also propose new projects. In the most recent funding application, project areas centered on an AI-enabled medtech data initiative and a talent-development pipeline project.

This is where "keeping everyone engaged" becomes important. Most partners do not have a formal obligation to attend meetings or contribute to every project, so GREATER MSP has to manage the coalition through ongoing relationship-building. Southwick describes this as a constant effort to keep partners connected to the work and bring them in when their expertise becomes relevant. Participation naturally fluctuates: partners tend to become more active when a project aligns with their institutional priorities, then recede when the work is less immediately relevant to their expertise. Southwick points to the September 2025 "all-coalition rally" as a full-coalition convening where GREATER MSP brought the broader partner network together and updated them on the hub's direction. This yielded stronger partnerships, greater information exchange, and renewed connections between the coalition.



Outer: Broader Network

Stays informed on the coalition's direction, ready to engage once a project is well scoped, or to apply learnings to adjacent innovation hubs and initiatives.

Middle: Coalition Partners

Organizational partners committed to one or more MedTech strategic priorities. Each has a primary representative who coordinates engaged experts on specific projects and can also propose new initiatives.

Core: CEO-Level Council

Functions as a board of directors with strategic oversight, supported by a "deputies" group of senior leaders, such as Chiefs of Staff, who handle day-to-day coordination.

A third, outermost circle includes a broader network of partners who stay informed on the coalition's direction. Some may engage once a project is well scoped, while others apply lessons to adjacent innovation hubs in their industries.

Translational Capacity

Minnesota MedTech's strength comes from its long-standing position in the medtech sector. The region has a mix of R&D capacity, management experience, and engineering talent. The region is home to major institutions, but these assets are spread across the broader region and do not automatically operate as one connected system. Mayo Clinic is in Rochester, the University of Minnesota is in the Twin Cities, and many medtech companies are located in the suburbs. Compared with the regional cluster and innovation hub in the Boston area, the Minnesota MedTech Region lacks a single center of gravity, but is probably no more fragmented.

The hub's strategy is to make Minnesota's medtech assets work more like a connected commercialization system. The AI-in-medtech initiative gives that strategy a specific focus on health data access. Southwick identifies data access as a central bottleneck because AI-enabled medical products need clinical data to support testing and validation beyond the lab. Health systems hold that data, though privacy rules and trust concerns make it difficult to share in a usable way. Minnesota's proposed advantage is a trusted regional process that enables healthcare providers, medtech firms, and the University of Minnesota to collaborate on testing and commercializing AI-enabled medical technologies. Federal funding can help build the coordination needed to move Minnesota's AI-medtech capacity toward commercialization. Fully built innovation platforms such as the Mayo Clinic Platform can also plug into this alliance, giving technical experts a way to guide prospective users toward the right resources.

Marketing and Positioning

Minnesota MedTech's marketing challenge centers on visibility. Southwick describes Minnesota as the country's second-largest medtech region after California, yet many still overlook its role. Southwick also states that Boston Scientific employs more people in Minnesota than the entire Boston medtech sector. Even with that scale, Minnesota still faces a "flyover territory" perception. The hub's priority is to raise Minnesota's profile among federal funders, startups, investors, international companies, and prospective talent.



MedTech partners convene in fall 2025 with a speaker from Vensana Capital. Photo courtesy of GREATER MSP.

The hub's response focuses on bringing more outside attention to the region. Southwick shares that Minnesota wants to attract major medtech conferences so national audiences can see the ecosystem directly. It also aims to position the region as a lower-cost U.S. base for growth-stage foreign medtech companies seeking access to the American market. These efforts also address the region's lack of a center of gravity, as conferences and external investment help create "density" by temporarily bringing firms, investors, researchers, and policymakers into one space.



The EDA Tech Hubs team tours a Minnesota manufacturing facility with coalition members and a state lawmaker.
Photo courtesy of GREATER MSP.

Southwick shares that Minnesota updated its federal-facing story as national priorities changed. In 2023, the hub's medtech designation aligned closely with post-pandemic concerns about medical supply chains. By the late-2025 Tech Hub implementation round application, the coalition connected medtech to a different federal environment, as part of a national competitiveness agenda. If the U.S. wants to compete in advanced medical technology, it needs domestic regions capable of developing and commercializing those products. Leaders in Minnesota argue that its medtech ecosystem could help meet that need, especially in areas like AI-enabled care and military medical technology.

Takeaway:

Strong regional assets need a clear public-facing strategy. The hub's marketing work focuses on making Minnesota's medtech ecosystem visible to external audiences and connecting its strengths to the federal priorities that shape current funding decisions.

Sustainable Polymers Case Study

Interview with Hans Dorfi, PhD, Executive Director and Chief Innovation Officer, Polymer Industry Cluster



Sustainable Polymers Tech Hub is located in Greater Akron, Ohio, a region with a long industrial history in rubber, plastics, and polymer manufacturing. The hub builds on Akron's legacy as a materials center. It brings together regional assets, including the Polymer Industry Cluster, the Greater Akron Chamber, the University of Akron's polymer expertise, regional manufacturers, workforce partners, and several commercialization organizations.

The hub focuses on moving sustainable rubber and plastics technologies toward U.S. manufacturing and deployment. Its case for investment centers on reducing the environmental and climate impacts of fossil fuel-derived polymers while strengthening domestic capacity in advanced materials.

EDA designated the hub in October 2023 and awarded it a \$400,000 strategy development grant to support regional planning and coordination. The hub submitted its Phase 2 application in February 2024 and received approximately \$51 million in EDA implementation funding in July 2024. In all, seven projects focus on polymer lifecycle innovation, workforce development, and cluster coordination.

Governance

Sustainable Polymers' governance is anchored in the Greater Akron Chamber, which is an economic development organization. The coalition uses a leadership committee for broad oversight, with a smaller executive committee brought in early on major priorities. Specialized working groups then develop strategies for areas such as research, commercialization, marketing, and workforce needs.

Dorfi serves as the hub's operational strategist and industry-facing coordinator. He became the formal leader after the Tech Hub award, when the coalition needed someone who understood the polymer industry and could work directly with technical and commercial partners. His background as Senior Vice President of Product Development at Bridgestone Americas gives him practical experience in rubber and polymer technology. At the same time, the hub also draws on regional expertise in plastics and adhesives.

The Chamber-based structure also gives the hub flexibility. Rather than building every function within the Tech Hub, the coalition uses existing regional institutions. The Chamber supports coordination and administrative functions. Bounce Innovation Hub supports startup activity, ConexusNEO supports workforce development, and universities contribute research capacity when needed. This allows the hub to remain relatively nimble while still drawing from the expertise of larger regional assets.

This governance structure is tailored to the technical complexity of polymer innovation. Moving technologies toward market use requires people who understand the equipment, scale-up process, and commercial pathway. Sustainable Polymers brings industry subject-matter experts into project ranking and priority-setting, ensuring decisions reflect what works in production. In Dorfi's view, effective governance means bringing technical and market expertise into the process early enough to shape what the hub builds, funds, and prioritizes.



Greater Akron delegates attend K 2025 in Düsseldorf, Germany. Photo courtesy of the Greater Akron Chamber.



Rendering of the planned Polymer Industry Cluster Innovation Pilot Facility at the University of Akron. Rendering courtesy of the Greater Akron Chamber and Polymer Industry Cluster.

Translational Capacity

Sustainable Polymers' translational capacity challenge centers on advancing polymer innovation from lab-scale research to industrial use. Dorfi emphasizes that the region has substantial technical expertise and physical infrastructure because of its long history in rubber and polymers. However, these assets are not always accessible to companies. The coalition creates accessible facilities and equipment by connecting companies with private and public resources through fee-for-service arrangements.

Dorfi identifies a specific gap in the commercialization pathway: research facilities can produce only small quantities of new materials, while companies need larger quantities to test processing at scale. The planned Polymer Pilot Facility at the University of Akron will allow companies to produce and process pilot-scale batches. This bridges the gap between early research and industrial processing, enabling companies to test both chemical performance and manufacturability without building expensive in-house infrastructure.

Akron's challenge lies in connecting its existing assets to commercialization. The hub makes regional infrastructure more accessible while adding capacity to test new materials.

Marketing and Positioning

Sustainable Polymers' marketing strategy is built around regional differentiation. The Akron region's selling point is that polymer innovation requires expensive equipment, pilot facilities, and specialized expertise, which the region has based on its long industrial history. This gives the coalition a concrete pitch to companies outside Ohio: "ideas may originate elsewhere, but Akron can help scale them because the relevant infrastructure, knowledge, and industry network are already present."

Dorfi describes the region's network of accessible facilities and equipment as its central advantage. Polymer innovation is difficult and capital-intensive, and the hub can offer a combination of legacy industry knowledge, research universities, company networks, startup space, and a planned pilot facility. Dorfi cites a New Jersey startup that opened an Ohio office after becoming interested in the hub's resources as an early example of interest from out-of-region companies. The marketing strategy is closely tied to business attraction and place-based innovation.



Sustainability framing also strengthens the region's story. Dorfi frames sustainable polymers through practical concerns such as supply chain resilience, future feedstocks, plastic waste, recycling, and waste-to-value technologies. He also emphasizes that sustainable technologies need to be economically viable. This makes the narrative easier to defend across political contexts because it connects the technology to economic growth, industrial competitiveness, national security, and materials the United States already depends on.

Attendees participate in a Greater Akron Chamber program focused on the region's polymer industry cluster. Photo courtesy of the Greater Akron Chamber.

Takeaway:

Sustainable Polymers demonstrates how a legacy manufacturing region can serve as a platform for commercialization. Akron's advantage lies in helping companies test whether sustainable polymer technologies can scale from small lab batches to industrial production.

iFAB Case Study

Interview with Beth Conerty, PhD, Regional Innovation Officer of the iFAB Tech Hub

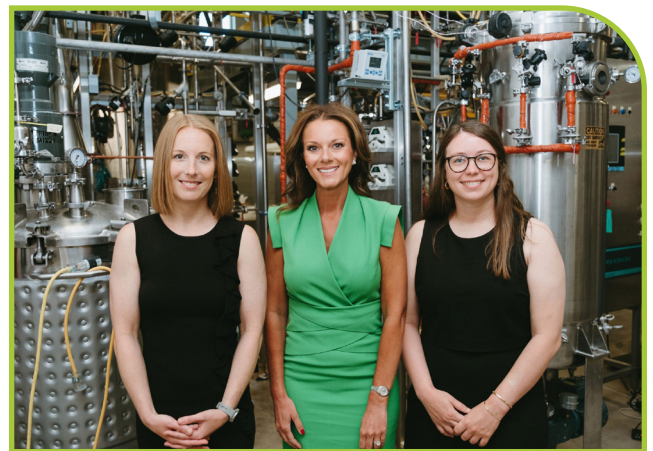


The Illinois Fermentation and Agriculture Biomanufacturing Tech Hub, or iFAB, is located in Central Illinois, with a strong base in the Champaign-Urbana area and at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. The hub builds on the region's agricultural economy, fermentation capacity, university research infrastructure, and existing relationships with major agricultural and food companies. Its core focus is precision fermentation and biomanufacturing, using agricultural commodities to produce higher-value products for food, industrial, and biotechnology markets. EDA selected iFAB as a designated Tech Hub in October 2023 and awarded it approximately \$51 million in implementation funding in July 2024. The implementation award supports projects intended to expand fermentation capacity, strengthen commercialization infrastructure, and grow the regional workforce for biomanufacturing.

Governance

iFAB's governance has been stable from the beginning. Conerty has served as regional innovation officer since the coalition first decided to pursue the Tech Hubs opportunity. The core leadership team began as a small group of five people who recognized the grant opportunity early and organized around it. That same leadership group remained in place from the initial application through the later implementation phase.

The leadership structure is heavily connected to the University of Illinois. Conerty notes that several members of the leadership team are employees of the University of Illinois, including herself. Conerty helps manage the Integrated Bioprocessing Research Laboratory (also known as IBRL, the pilot-scale facility on the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign campus). At the same time, other leaders from the chancellor's office and the university's research and innovation infrastructure participated. This internal governance structure combined institutional authority with translational capacity. The university could convene partners, manage a complex federal application, and point to real facilities that could support scale-up. Public materials featured the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign as the lead, reinforcing its strong anchor role in the hub's coordination model.



iFAB leadership team members Beth Conerty, Nicole Bateman, and Carly McCrory-McKay at the Integrated Bioprocessing Research Laboratory. Photo courtesy of Anna Longworth Photography.

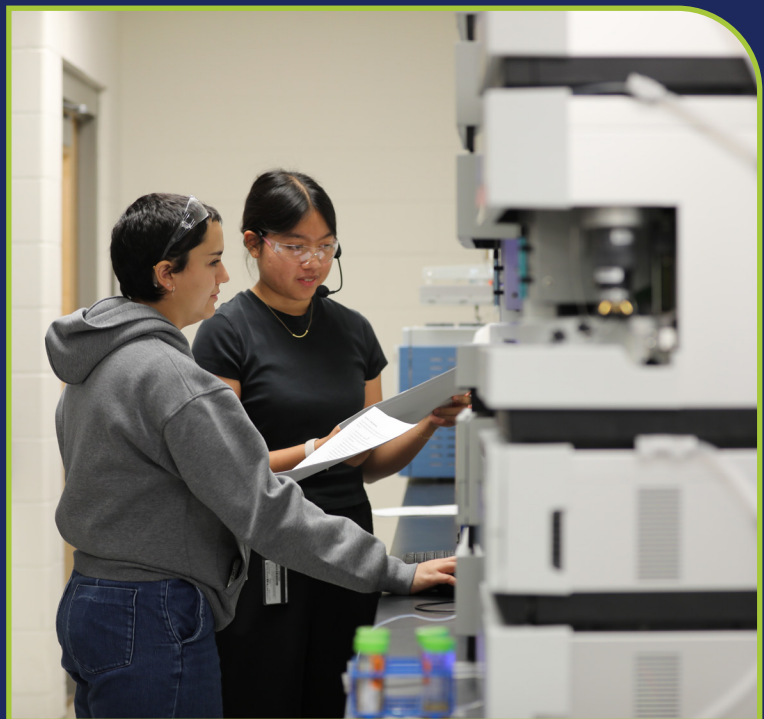
Having a small, consistent leadership group helped iFAB move quickly and maintain continuity while drawing on a much larger institutional base.

Translational Capacity

iFAB's translational capacity centers on solving a scale-up problem in precision fermentation. The region has strong agricultural inputs, university research, and relevant industrial partners, but biomanufacturing companies need access to facilities that allow them to move from lab work to larger production runs. EDA describes iFAB's implementation projects as focused on expanding facilities to enable more companies to commercialize precision fermentation technologies and increase production capacity. This is central to the hub's value proposition: Central Illinois can help companies turn agricultural feedstocks into commercial products by combining crop supply, fermentation infrastructure, and applied research capacity within the same regional ecosystem.

iFAB's leadership had a clear view of this commercialization pathway because of the University of Illinois pilot plants. Conerty's role running those facilities matters because pilot plants sit directly between research and industrial production. They allow companies to test whether a fermentation process can work beyond the bench before committing to a full commercial-scale investment. For iFAB, fermentation capacity allows companies to test, refine, and scale biomanufacturing processes using regional agricultural inputs.

The Tech Hub implementation award supports this translational logic. EDA notes that iFAB's projects include facility upgrades, shared equipment, commercialization support, and capital access designed to attract global companies while retaining homegrown entrepreneurs. The result will be a complete "lab-to-line" ecosystem wherein companies can stay in one region throughout their entire scale-up process, utilizing the hub's pilot, demo, and commercialization-scale facilities. The proposal also includes workforce development because both equipment and trained labor limit scale capacity. The public iFAB narrative describes lab-to-market bottlenecks in precision fermentation, including demand for pilot and demonstration-scale fermenters that exceeds available capacity.



An IBRL student demonstrates analytical laboratory equipment.
Photo courtesy of IBRL.

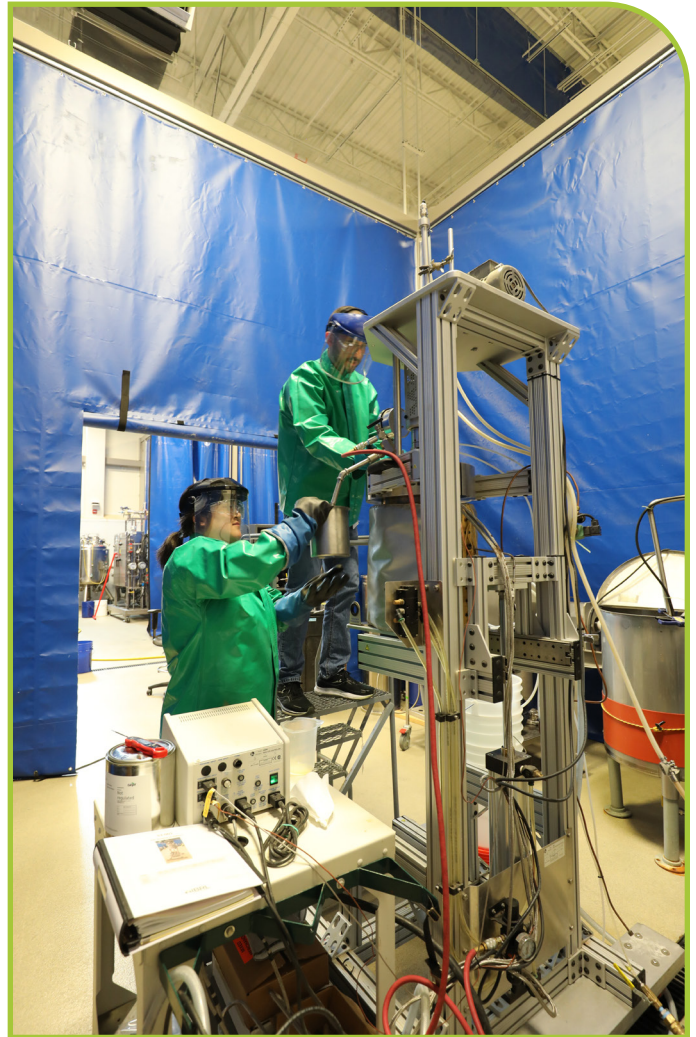
Marketing and Positioning

iFAB's funding case was strongest when it packaged Central Illinois as a region capable of turning agricultural production into advanced biomanufacturing capacity. Conerty's account suggests that the coalition's story began with a concrete regional base with nationwide potential. The region had agricultural inputs, university infrastructure, and pilot-scale capacity. iFAB's task was to demonstrate that these assets could support precision fermentation in ways that advance federal priorities in biotechnology, domestic production, and supply-chain resilience.

Conerty explains that the effort began when a small group recognized the Tech Hubs opportunity and quickly organized around it: "Somebody called me over and said, 'You need to get over here because we need to talk about this grant opportunity.'" From the beginning, the pitch seems to have been shaped by people who understood the region's applied capacity, not just its research reputation. Conerty herself notes that she "run[s] our pilot plants," which matters because iFAB's value proposition depends on the ability to help companies move fermentation technologies closer to commercial use.

The resulting narrative connected a familiar regional identity to a strategic future in technology. Central Illinois could be presented as a place where agricultural inputs serve as the foundation for higher-value biomanufacturing. That narrative showed how investment in iFAB would support regional economic development while also building U.S. capacity in a technology area tied to national competitiveness.

Conerty emphasizes the value of continuity in promoting the region. iFAB's core leadership team has been the same since the coalition first decided to pursue the grant. This stability enabled the hub to package itself consistently across designation and implementation rounds. The same leaders remained involved as the coalition moved from ideation toward implementation, helping iFAB present a coherent story about "why Central Illinois, why biomanufacturing, and why the region could actually execute."



Students working with the IBRL equipment. Photo courtesy of IBRL.

Takeaway:

iFAB shows how a region can adapt a traditional economic base to be relevant to newer industries. Central Illinois' agricultural strengths become more fundable when the hub connects them to fermentation capacity, domestic production needs, and companies looking to scale biomanufacturing.

KC BioHub Case Study

Interview with Melissa Roberts Chapman, President & Regional Innovation Officer of KC BioHub.



KC BioHub is located in the Kansas City region, covering eastern Kansas to western Missouri. The hub is led by BioNexus KC, a regional life sciences nonprofit, and received its initial Tech Hub designation in October 2023. In the original designation, Kansas City was positioned to strengthen U.S. biomanufacturing for human and animal health, with an emphasis on vaccine-related biologics, biosecurity, and domestic production capacity. EDA described the hub as an effort to increase production of biologic medicines, cancer therapeutics, and technologies that protect the U.S. food supply.

KC BioHub was one of the designated inaugural Tech Hubs, but it did not receive a major implementation award in July 2024. Instead, BioNexus KC received a \$500,000 Consortium Accelerator Award, which gave the coalition support to refine its strategy after designation. The coalition moved from a broad vaccine-and-lab-to-market story to a clearer role in biologics development, testing, and manufacturing. In July 2026, EDA announced it intends to award \$34 million in implementation funding to the Kansas City BioSecure Manufacturing Tech Hub (Kansas, Missouri) as one of the six Tech Hubs selected in that round; the award has not been finalized or disbursed.

Governance

KC BioHub's governance is housed within BioNexus KC, a nonprofit. The Tech Hub has its own advisory structure. It legally answers to the BioNexus KC board, while the advisory board is smaller and more directly tied to the region's economic development system. The board includes the Chamber, the Civic Council, the Kansas City Area Development Council, and the Mid-America Regional Council, as well as industry members and entrepreneurs.



KC BioHub leaders, federal officials, and U.S. Rep. Sharice Davids tour the biotech startup Ronawk in Johnson County. Photo courtesy of BioNexus KC.

Roberts Chapman argues that Tech Hubs and Engines are about transforming an economy, so the lead organization should focus on economic transformation. In Roberts Chapman's assessment, Kansas City's universities have relevant research capacity but less institutional incentive to lead the changes in commercialization pathways central to the hub's strategy. This makes university leadership a less natural fit for KC BioHub. A nonprofit lead for the hub brings economic development actors closer to decision-making, given the hub's relationship with organizations more directly tied to industry.

BioNexus KC serves as a leader for grant applications and makes prioritization decisions. Roberts Chapman describes the engagement model as "we give the work back." Partners are pulled in when their expertise is needed, and the hub avoids meetings without a clear purpose. Her line, "we only call you when we need your help," captures the model in which participation remains meaningful by giving partners specific work rather than passive endorsement.

Translational Capacity

KC BioHub's translational capacity is best understood through the region's role in the biologics development process. Kansas City initially had a clearer sense of its research assets than of its role in industry. Early planning produced what she describes as a "mess of a wish list of programs," because the coalition was still figuring out where the region could add practical value.

The clearest capacity gap was between discovery and market-ready production. Roberts Chapman notes that vaccine commercialization was difficult to build a strategy around because "there is no market for vaccines until there is," especially for rare or emerging infectious diseases that are not yet urgent public health threats. That pushed KC BioHub to focus on development and manufacturing, where Kansas City can "make what they discover."

KC BioHub is different from a lab-to-market commercialization model centered on university spinouts. Its translational capacity lies in helping biologics move through the practical stages that determine if a discovery can become a usable product. The region's animal health corridors are central to preclinical testing. Roberts Chapman points to pharmacokinetics, toxicity, and efficacy testing as areas where the overlap between animal and human health creates a concrete development advantage.

The broader implication is that KC BioHub's value is not measured by how many biologics discoveries originate in the region, but by how the region can help discoveries become safer, more validated, and more manufacturable.



Regional leaders join EDA Chief of Staff Maryam Janani-Flores for a roundtable discussion in Kansas City. Photo courtesy of BioNexus KC.

Marketing and Positioning

KC BioHub's positioning shifted from a broad biosecurity story toward a clearer argument about national production capacity. The original designation narrative fit the post-pandemic policy environment, in which vaccine production and domestic supply chains received strong federal attention. Public materials emphasized vaccine manufacturing, preventative technologies, biosecurity, and the region's animal-human health intersection.

Roberts Chapman acknowledges that the political environment "shaped and shepherded" their thinking. Their assets were "very real" and durable beyond any one administration. The coalition used the policy environment to refine a regional role that already had substance.



Inside an MRIGlobal biologics laboratory in Kansas City. Photo courtesy of PGAV Architects.

KC BioHub's later framing became clearer when the coalition stopped trying to present Kansas City as another coastal biotech hub. Roberts Chapman describes the old framing as trying to "out Boston, Boston." The refined strategy positions Kansas City as a complement to discovery centers. As other regions generate biologics discoveries, Kansas City can help companies develop, test, and manufacture them. That gives the hub a more specific role in the national bioeconomy and ties its strategy more closely to industry needs.

Takeaway:

KC BioHub's strongest case lies in its overlap between animal health and human biologics. The region can support the preclinical testing and development work that helps discoveries move closer to manufacturable products.

The July 2026 Round and What It Signals

The two most recent developments among this paper's four coalitions, Minnesota MedTech's non-selection and KC BioHub's intended award, came in the EDA implementation round, announced July 20, 2026. The July 2026 round provided \$169 million across six Tech Hubs, compared with approximately \$504 million across 12 hubs in July 2024. The selected projects emphasize advanced manufacturing, domestic production, supply-chain resilience, energy security, and national competitiveness. This differs from the post-pandemic public-health framing that influenced the original strategies of Minnesota MedTech and KC BioHub. KC BioHub's own shift away from a vaccine-and-lab-to-market story toward positioning the region as a complement to discovery centers, described in Roberts Chapman's interview above, tracks this broader change in federal priorities. The public record does not establish that this repositioning caused the selection.

Two of the twelve new NSF Engines landed in regions this paper covers: the NSF Critical Materials Crossroads Engine in the Kansas City region, led by the University of Missouri-Kansas City, and the NSF NEO-SMART Engine in Northeast Ohio, led by Case Western Reserve University.

Kansas City and Northeast Ohio now have overlapping federal place-based investments with separate lead organizations, strategies, and governance structures. The programs may complement one another, but their technology focus, partners, and implementation activities may also overlap.

What These Cases Suggest

Across these four cases, regional assets became more legible as an investment strategy when coalitions identified specific commercialization gaps that existing assets, including universities, firms, infrastructure, and industry history, could help address. Those gaps took several forms, including pilot-scale infrastructure, access to health data, preclinical testing, and scale-up capacity. Naming a well-scoped bottleneck gave partners a concrete problem around which to organize and showed how federal investment could change the path to commercialization.

Once the gap was clear, governance became the means by which a coalition could turn the idea into execution. Clear partner roles helped coalitions decide which projects to pursue and who needed to participate. Technical expertise also helped coalitions determine what infrastructure and activities to prioritize.

Framing connected the regional strategy to a federal funding case. Coalitions needed to explain why the work mattered in the current policy environment and how their region could contribute. Clear framing made the region's role easy to understand by tying local strengths to specific federal priorities, such as national competitiveness, domestic production, and supply chain resilience. The cases also show that coalitions may need to revisit that framing as federal priorities change.

These patterns offer observations for practitioners, not a checklist for winning. Funding decisions reflect factors this paper cannot isolate.

They indicate that regions benefit from:

- Defining a specific commercialization bottleneck
- Organizing the right partners and technical expertise around it
- Maintaining continuity
- Preparing to coordinate multiple federal investments

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