

2024 Connecting Entrepreneurial Communities Conference: Session Descriptions

The CEC Conference offers 16 sessions across 4 thematic tracks. Attendees can attend all four of a certain track or skip around the tracks.

- **Track 1: Entrepreneurship and Economic Development**
- **Track 2: Resources to Support Local Business**
- **Track 3: Community Belonging Through Entrepreneurship**
- **Track 4: Innovations in Local Agri-Food Business**

Track 1: Entrepreneurship and Economic Development

Session 1: Economic Development Strategy, Roles, and Tactics

Description: Just getting started or wanting to get more traction in your economic development efforts? There are systems to employ to get everyone onboard for new projects, ensuring you have a pathway to prioritization and success. From working with entrepreneurs to larger businesses, learn about strategies that can help get your team to the finish line.

Speaker:

- Jasen Glasbrenner, Director, Richland Center Economic Development

When & Where: Thursday, May 30, 11:30am-12:30pm, Rountree Gallery, 120 W. Main St.

Session 2: Economic Development Case Study: Grant County

Description: The Grant County Economic Development Corporation (GCEDC) is a 30+ year success story. At 1200 square miles, Grant County hosts manufacturing, farming, retail, healthcare, and a host of entrepreneurial businesses. How does one organization bring them all together for smart growth and development? Hear firsthand how the GCEDC is getting business done.

Speakers:

- Ron Brisbois, Executive Director, GCEDC
- John Fick, UW Platteville EDA University Center Coordinator and President of GCEDC
- Sheila Ruchti, Senior Vice President Community First Bank and President-Elect of GCEDC

When & Where: Thursday, May 30, 2-3pm, Platteville Public Library, 225 W. Main St.

Session 3: Key Partners in Dynamic Entrepreneurial Ecosystems

Description: A dynamic entrepreneurial ecosystem goes beyond chambers of commerce and economic development committees. Learn from organizations broadening the scope of outreach to entrepreneurs –the Ethnic and Diverse Business Coalition of Wisconsin, the Wisconsin Diverse Entrepreneur Network, and Wisconsin Community Action Program – and how you can partner with them to bring their services to your local community.

Speakers:

- Olivia Otte, Executive Director, Green County Economic Development Corporation (moderator)
- Marjorie Ruckers, Chair, Ethnic and Diverse Business Coalition of Wisconsin
- Hetti Brown, Executive Director, Couleecap, Inc./Wisconsin Community Action Program

When & Where: Thursday, May 30, 3:30-4:30pm, Avalon Theater, 95 E. Main St.

Session 4: Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Building in Practice with the REV Program

Description: Learn about a new initiative in Wisconsin for small towns to participate in long-term and facilitated community development planning with Rural Entrepreneurial Ventures (REV). REV employs an evidence-based framework designed to advance small-town economics through a targeted business approach. Learn about the stories of communities in Minnesota, Nebraska, and Oregon that have gone through the REV program, as well as Wisconsin's plans to implement REV in 5-7 communities later this year.

Speakers:

- Mia Ljung, County Educator, University of Wisconsin Extension
- Neil Linscheid, Entrepreneurship State Specialist, University of Minnesota Extension
- Pam Bishop, Vice President of Entrepreneurship, Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation

When & Where: Friday, May 31, 9:30-10:30am, City Hall Auditorium, 75 N. Bonson St.

Track 2: Resources to Support Local Business

Session 1: Start-Up Support and Resources 101

Description: This interactive session offers invaluable insights and practical guidance for entrepreneurs, economic developers, and ecosystem participants seeking to navigate offerings from the Small Business Development Center, Center for Technology and Commercialization, and the Food Finance Institute. All programs serve Wisconsin under the Institute for Business & Entrepreneurship. Attendees will work in teams to develop strategies to direct entrepreneurs to services in their region.

Speakers:

- Nora Roughen-Schmidt, Business Consultant, Small Business Development Center
- Andrew Larson, Food Finance Institute and SBDC Farm Outreach Specialist
- Colleen Merrill, Special Project Director, Institute for Business & Entrepreneurship
- Margaret Ramay, Director, Center for Technology Commercialization

When & Where: Thursday, May 30, 11:30am-12:30pm, Platteville Public Library, 225 W. Main St.

Session 2: Wisconsin Incubator Round Table

Description: Incubators are a great way to foster new businesses. Come learn about the secrets of successful incubators, the partners that work with them, and how to move forward with your own local incubator dreams. Communities large and small with and without dedicated Incubator buildings can develop programming to drive success.

Speakers:

- Kate Koziol, Executive Director, Platteville Business Incubator
- Larry Wells, Interim Director, Coulee Region Business Center
- Sonya Silvers, Manager, Benton Business Incubator

When & Where: Thursday, May 30, 2-3pm, Avalon Theater, 95 E. Main St.

Session 3: Business Start-Up Financing Resources

Description: Equity. Debt. Grants. Revolving Loan Funds. Learn the ins and outs of small business financing and how economic developers can facilitate access to financing in rural communities. The discussion will also cover success stories of alternative financing approaches like the Capital Catalyst Program, and how to start and operate community-based funding pools.

Speaker:

- Beth Haskovec, Director, Office of Rural Prosperity at Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation
- Garvester Kelley, Principal Community Development Specialist, Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago

When & Where: Thursday, May 30, 3:30-4:30pm, City Hall Auditorium, 75 N. Bonson St.

Session 4: Preserving Community Assets: Facilitating Business Succession Planning

Description: Learn about the crucial relationships behind successful business succession. Local Main Street Program staff and volunteers play a key role in general community relationship building that can ultimately result in the ability to match buyer to seller. Complementing that is the Main Street Program's business succession training and technical assistance programs. Learn about how your community can take advantage of these resources, whether or not it has a Mainstreet chapter.

Speakers:

- Errin Welty, Senior Director of Downtown Development, Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation
- Todd Barman, Downtown Development Specialist, University of Wisconsin Extension

When & Where: Friday, May 31, 9:30-10:30am, Platteville Public Library, 225 W. Main St.

Track 3: Community Belonging Through Entrepreneurship

Session 1: Entrepreneurship with the Wisconsin Latino Chamber of Commerce

Description: Entrepreneurs from the Latino/Hispanic community are making major contributions to innovation and economic growth to Wisconsin's rural economy. Hear from business owners in the food, agriculture, retail, and childcare sectors about their entrepreneurship journeys.

Speakers:

- Temo Xopin, Director of Statewide Strategy and Business Development, Wisconsin Latino Chamber of Commerce (moderator)
- Carolina Martinez, Co-Owner, Los Amigos Restaurant in Platteville
- Denis Martinez, Owner, Nicas Markets in Platteville
- 2-3 more rural entrepreneurs (names forthcoming)

When & Where: Thursday, May 30, 11:30am-12:30pm, Avalon Theater, 95 E. Main St.

Session 2: Creating Communities of Belonging in Rural Wisconsin

Description: A key factor to the vitality of rural communities is a culture that welcomes newcomers. Learn about initiatives in Darlington, Monroe, and New Glarus to build multicultural communities and a sense of belonging for anyone who makes the Driftless Region their home.

Speakers:

- Victoria Solomon, Community Development Associate Professor, UW- Extension (moderator)
- Ale Corona, Owner, Mi Casita in Darlington
- Kalee Crist, ESL Teacher, Darlington Community School District
- Officer Neftali Gutierrez, Hispanic Liaison Officer, City of Darlington
- Officer Jeff Skatrud, Green County Sheriff, Green County Latino Law Enforcement Advisory Board
- Rosario Tavares, Bilingual Banker, The Bank of New Glarus

When & Where: Thursday, May 30, 2-3pm, City Hall Auditorium, 75 N. Bonson St.

Session 3: Collective Entrepreneurship through Cooperatives

Description: Learn about the cooperative business model and stages of development. Through start-ups and conversions, cooperatives provide entrepreneurs with a creative and viable model to meet economic and community needs collectively. Cooperative entities often outperform competitors in retention and resilience while keeping dollars in the local economy. Learn more about support available to cooperative enterprises throughout the state.

Speakers:

- Kristin Forde, Cooperative Development Specialist, University of Wisconsin Center for Cooperatives
- Jeff Glazer, Clinical Professor, Law & Entrepreneurship Clinic

When & Where: Thursday, May 30, 3:30-4:30pm, Rountree Gallery, 120 W. Main St.

Session 4: Comienzos: Building Latino Entrepreneurship

Description: The Comienzos Program -- "Fomentando Empresas Latinas" -- was developed to provide bilingual outreach, bicultural assistance, and business counseling to Spanish-speaking entrepreneurs as well as business owners in South Central Wisconsin. A business partnership between WWBIC and UW-Madison SBDC, the Comienzos Program offers direct business advice, one-on-one personal and confidential counseling, business workshops, small group training, business plan assistance and review, access to responsible capital, as well as fostering business relationships at no cost to our clients. Learn from the success stories of the Comienzos program, as well as receive guidance on initiating programming for entrepreneurs in your own community.

Speakers:

- Kara Schuster, Southwest Regional Director, Wisconsin Women's Business Initiative Corporation (moderator)
- Arlene J. Bollig, Comienzos Program Manager, Wisconsin Women's Business Initiative Corporation
- Isabella Sgriccia, Kiva Capital Access Manager, Wisconsin Women's Business Initiative Corporation
- Jeff Glazer, Clinical Professor, Law & Entrepreneurship Clinic

When & Where: Friday, May 31, 9:30-10:30am, Rountree Gallery, 120 W. Main St.

Track 4: Innovations in Local Agri-Food Business

Session 1: Creating a Sustainable Agriculture Engine through Use-Inspired Innovation

Description: A WiSys-led coalition is developing a Sustainable Agriculture Engine to make food production more economically, environmentally and, socially sustainable. This is in the development stage and is creating a new use-inspired model to connect researchers, entrepreneurs, growers, and industry to develop farmer- and industry-inspired innovations in food and agriculture. In this panel, you will learn more about the federally funded program and how innovators and entrepreneurs can engage with Engine partners and network to solve big problems facing agricultural communities.

Speakers:

- Adhira Sunkara, Director of Strategy and Innovative Ventures, WiSys

When & Where: Thursday, May 30, 11:30am-12:30pm, City Hall Auditorium, 75 N. Bonson St.

Session 2: Financial Resources for Agripreneurs

Description: The interest in agri-preneurship is rising as farmers look to diversify income and create new methods for sustainable farming. This panel of financial service providers will survey the financing options available to agripreneurs, how to secure financing, as well as successes and failures they've seen as lenders to the ag sector.

Speakers:

- Andy Larson, Farm Program Manager, Food Finance Institute (moderator)
- Paul Dietman, New Markets Senior Focused Lending Specialist, Compeer Financial
- Nicholas Felder, Vice President, Commercial/Ag Banking, MidWestOne Bank
- Ashley Tibbits, Assistant Vice President, Farmer Savings Bank
- Daniel O'Brien, Farm Loan Specialist, USDA/Farm Service Agency

When & Where: Thursday, May 30, 2-3pm, Rountree Gallery, 120 W. Main St.

Session 3: Local Food System Development: What is the economic impact?

Description: Local foods and agriculture are a highlight of rural Wisconsin entrepreneurship. But what is the impact of these types of businesses on the rural Wisconsin economy? This conversation will focus on the measurable and immeasurable ways that local food and ag contribute to the rural economy, helping economic development decision makers determine how local food systems fit into their economic development strategy. It will also cover what economic developers can do to support entrepreneurial farmers in rural Wisconsin.

Speakers:

- Andy Larson, Farm Program Manager, Food Finance Institute (moderator)
- Steven Deller, Professor & Community Development Extension Specialist, University of Wisconsin Madison
- Brett Olson, Creative Director, Renewing the Countryside
- Julie Lassa, State Director, USDA/Rural Development

When & Where: Thursday, May 30, 3:30-4:30pm, Platteville Public Library, 225 W. Main St.

Session 4: New Crops and New Farms: A Panel of Driftless Agripreneurs

Description: This will be a lively discussion with many farm variations, from agri-tourism to retreats and farm-grown pizza and beer. Learn about the vast array of farming options, including the triumphs and the challenges of blazing new trails.

Speakers:

- Abby Haas, Platteville Area Industrial Corporation (moderator)
- Kyle Vesperman, Owner, Vesperman Farms
- Joy Miller, Founder and Executive Director, Driftless Curiosity
- Chad Foresburg, Owner, Footjoy Farm and Brewing
- Sarah Lloyd, Supply Chain Specialist, Grassland 2.0

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