

Program will help give climate tech startups a leg up



Mike Riedlinger, executive director of technology commercialization at NextCorps, a nonprofit catalyst for entrepreneurship. (Provided photo)

Climate technology startups can now apply for a spot in a local manufacturing readiness program that will help the ventures bring their business ideas to market.

Applications are now being accepted for a spot in Cohort 3 of the Hardware Scaleup program, which will kick off in October.

Funded by New York State Energy Research and Development Authority and run by NextCorps in Rochester, the program supports climate technology innovation from prototype to production. A similar program is run by Second Muse downstate, called M-Corps.

Companies are encouraged to submit their application by Sept. 15. There is no cost to join.

The announcement for Cohort 3 comes after NYSERDA renewed its support of NextCorps and SecondMuse earlier this year to advance the scale-up of innovation to meet Gov. Andrew Cuomo's Climate and Clean Energy goals, as outlined in the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act.

The selection criterion for the program focuses on the potential of an existing hardware prototype device that can be scaled up to mass production to meaningfully lower carbon emissions and support clean energy, said Mike Riedlinger, executive director of technology commercialization at NextCorps, a nonprofit catalyst for entrepreneurship.

The Cohort 3 manufacturing program provides entrepreneurs with a mix of support that helps accelerate manufacturing readiness and quickly move prototypes into volume production, he said.

Participating startups will have access to a team of manufacturing experts ranging from



Ron Wexler, WexEnergy's founder, chief technology officer and chief product officer. (Provided photo)

product and package designers to sourcing agents and engineers, as well as a cohort of peers, suppliers and opportunities to showcase their ideas and products.

It also provides the support and resources to speed time to market, and reduce risks, waste and costs along

the way, Riedlinger noted.

Those in the cohort are able to work with a range of New York manufacturers in areas including plastic injection molders, computer numerical controlled machining, assembly line processes and shipping and handling functions.

"We are able to take advantage of the large base of manufacturers in the region," Riedlinger said. "Our programs are structured to give entrepreneurs access to the connections that can help them successfully move their technologies into volume manufacturing."

The assistance has had an impact on a young company's success, demonstrating the value of both manufacturing readiness and access to global and domestic manufacturers across the state, Riedlinger said.

Since starting the program some two years ago, 33 startups have been supported by NextCorps and SecondMuse.

Collectively these companies have raised an additional \$28 million in funding during their time in the program while generating roughly \$10 million in sales revenue.

Some of the companies that have participated in past cohorts include two Rochester-based firms. They are Combined Energies LLC, which commercializes novel power electronics for the clean energy market and Cellec Technologies Inc., an energy storage

systems manufacturer.

WexEnergy LLC of Rochester was a participant in the first cohort.

The business makes energy-saving window retrofits. Its primary product is called WindowSkin, which is an interior mounted window insulation panel that keeps the heat inside during cold weather and outside during warm weather.

WexEnergy held a soft launch of its products in 2019 and is currently in discussions with channel partners, as well as window installation companies, which could get the firm's products in a wider range of markets and geographies.

Ron Wexler, WexEnergy's founder, chief technology officer and chief product officer, said when he first heard about the NextCorps program the timing was ideal since the company had a proof of concept prototype and was looking to ramp up broad scale manufacturing efforts at a low cost.

"It was absolutely critical for us," Wexler said, adding that the program provides the structure young companies need, from project support to mentorships. "They show you how to get things done and do them the right way."

Riedlinger added that the program's success is a group effort.

Partners include educational institutions, such as the Golisano Institute for Sustainability and Venture Creations at Rochester Institute of Technology and Cornell University, as well as contract manufacturers, including Peko Precision Products Inc., HARBEC Inc., Surmotech and Z-Axis Inc. Other partners include the Rochester Angel Network, Excell Partners Inc. and Launch NY.

"The partnerships and collaborations make a huge difference," Riedlinger said.

To apply to or learn more about the program, go to <https://mcorps.paperform.co/>.

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