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WASHINGTON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION (WEDA)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 12, 2026

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Contact Information for Award Winners and Professional Photos Available Upon Request

Washington Economic Development Association (WEDA)

Celebrates Excellence in Economic Development with 2026 WEDA Economic Development Awards

Washington – The leaders of Washington Economic Development Association (WEDA), Washington’s only trade association laser-focused on economic development, awarded their 2026 Economic Development Awards at a special Awards Ceremony on February 25 at their 2026 Winter Conference in Olympia/Lacey, WA. Professional photos are now available upon request.

“WEDA’s Economic Development Awards celebrate outstanding achievement in economic development at the highest level,” said WEDA Board Chair Gina Stark, who also serves as CEO of Stark Impact Consulting. “There are leaders across our entire state working tirelessly to grow jobs and strengthen economic vitality in their communities. These awards honor leaders and projects that are excelling in this impactful work.”

Amanda Wallner, WEDA Awards Committee Chair who also serves as Economic Development Manager for the City of Richland added, “We received a significant number of impressive nominations from communities across Washington. The nominations reflect a unique array of the breadth and diversity of important work taking place by economic developers in Washington. These projects are often complex and require extensive collaboration and creative partnerships.”

2026 WEDA award winners recognized for outstanding achievement in Economic Development include:

2026 EMERGING PROFESSIONAL IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Emerging Professional Award is given to a person who has made a significant contribution to his/her community, is a promising future leader in the industry, or who has become an integral member of his or her community, creating significant support for economic development.

This year there were two awardees in this category. Said Mandy Wallner during the presentation, “WEDA is thrilled to share that on top of the WEDA Emerging Leader Award, one of our members and sponsors, Grow America, has honored each of these leaders with a scholarship for their Economic Development Finance

Professional (EDFP) training. The EDFP Training includes four courses: Economic Development Finance, Business Credit Analysis, Real Estate Development Finance and The Art of Deal Structuring and Problem Solving. Thank you again to Grow America for this amazing contribution!”

2026 EMERGING PROFESSIONAL IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Rhyanne Berryman

The nomination for Rhyanne Berryman came from a colleague, Jill Essency, who is a new Co-Chair of WEDA’s Emerging Leaders Group. Jill stated that Rhyanne “exemplifies the qualities of an emerging leader through her dedication to fostering economic growth, building meaningful relationships, and creating opportunities for businesses and communities to thrive. Her energy, vision, and collaborative spirit have already made a significant impact.” From their first conversation, Jill was inspired by her “enthusiasm for economic development and her ability to approach challenges with creativity and optimism. She always has an energetic attitude and a positive spirit.”

Essency furthered, “Rhyanne’s leadership style is rooted in genuine relationship-building. She makes a big impact in her role -- listening actively, engaging thoughtfully and working tirelessly to strengthen community ties. She facilitates the county’s coalition for health, managing a group for several different organizations, ensuring they align for a common goal. Her ability to manage challenges with optimism and adaptability speaks to her resilience—traits that are essential for emerging leaders in economic development. Her recent promotion to Director of Business & Community Engagement is a testament to her exceptional contributions and potential.”

Said Mandy Wallner as she presented the award, “Rhyanne is my mentee in WEDA’s Mentorship program, so this is a particular honor for me to present this award. Beyond her professional achievements, Rhyanne is a champion for younger professionals entering the economic development field. The WEDA Emerging Professional Award recognizes individuals who demonstrate exceptional promise and leadership in economic development. Rhyanne Berryman is a shining example of these qualities. Her passion, professionalism, and commitment to community make her an outstanding candidate for this honor.”

2026 EMERGING PROFESSIONAL IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Phoebe Reid

The second Emerging Professional in Economic Development award was awarded to Phoebe Reid, who will also receive the full scholarship to Grow America’s Economic Development Finance Professional training.

In his nomination of Phoebe, David Ballif, the Executive Director of EDC Team Jefferson said, “Since joining the Economic Development Council of Jefferson County in June 2025 as a Workforce Development Specialist, Phoebe has demonstrated a remarkable standard of leadership, strategic vision, and operational excellence. Phoebe quickly proved herself indispensable, assuming leadership of the complex federal Recompete program sub-award for Team Jefferson. Her impact was immediate and tangible. She spearheaded a comprehensive employer outreach campaign to identify skills gaps, bridging the divide between education providers and industry needs. Her work went beyond standard meetings; she facilitated a critical tour of the Port Townsend Paper Mill for social service providers to address recruitment barriers and engaged regional partners like AJAC, Olympic Connect, and Impact Washington to explore manufacturing apprenticeships.”

David also said, “Phoebe’s ability to convene stakeholders is exemplary. She led Jefferson County’s first-ever Manufacturers Convening, co-hosted with the Port of Port Townsend. Remarkably, she achieves these professional milestones while simultaneously pursuing her MBA at the University of Washington’s Foster School of Business, from which she will graduate this June. Phoebe’s unique ability to apply the academic discipline of her current MBA studies to practical economic challenges is evident in her success mobilizing

partners ranging from the Port of Port Townsend to Impact Washington. In rapidly pivoting from a specialist role to leading countywide convenings and managing agency budgets, Phoebe has become the structural backbone of our team and a definitive leader for the future of Washington’s economic development community.”

2026 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADVOCATE OF THE YEAR

Chad Melton – Virginia Mason Franciscan Health

This award recognizes a person or group of people who made a significant and/or innovative contribution to an economic development project or program during the past year. This award recognizes that economic development professionals must rely on a whole host of others in order to be successful. These are sometimes the “silent heroes” of economic development who have contributed significantly to advancement of the economic development profession or were involved in a significant project in a creative way.

This year, the WEDA Awards Committee selected Chad Melton as the Economic Development Advocate of the Year. In the nomination of Chad for this award, the Kitsap Economic Development Association focused on Chad’s leadership of the Health Sciences Expansion at Olympic College Poulsbo and in three areas:

1) Investment in Olympic College: Chad successfully secured a \$2.5 million gift from his employer, Virginia Mason Franciscan Health, to invest in the first phase of the Health Sciences Expansion at Olympic College Poulsbo. This contributed to a \$10.5 million public-private partnership, which allowed the renovation and expansion of the Olympic College Poulsbo campus to increase Allied Health careers in Kitsap. The renovation was completed October 2025. Virginia Mason’s investment in Olympic College created a brand-new radiology tech classroom at the Poulsbo campus, and created the opportunity for 20 students a year to go through that program in the Virginia Mason Franciscan Health Learning Labs. This investment also helped unlock the rest of the first phase of Olympic College’s renovation and expansion, enabling some 70 more students to attend expanded healthcare programs in Poulsbo including in surgical tech, ultrasound tech, phlebotomy certification, and in the Practical Nursing Navy Corpsman Bridge Program, which allows for a more efficient path for military medics to become certified nurses.

2) Direct Support of Economic Development: Chad has been a member of KEDA's board and executive committee since 2022. He has served as KEDA’s Treasurer and currently serves as Vice Chair. In 2024 he was instrumental in the success of KEDA’s first five-year regional economic strategy, One Kitsap. Under his leadership Virginia Mason Franciscan Health increased their investment in KEDA by 2.5 times, becoming one of four “champion investors” that invested \$50,000 or more in KEDA annually. This led to other private investors increasing their investment in KEDA, which allowed our economic development alliance to grow staff, increase impact, and bring KEDA’s funding model closer to parity with of public and private funding.

3) Growing Kitsap’s Healthcare Footprint. Under Chad’s leadership Virginia Mason Franciscan Health has also vastly increased its investment in Kitsap—they have opened three new facilities in 2025, including a \$23 million investment in two new freestanding emergency rooms in Bremerton and Port Orchard. They also opened a \$120 million new tower at St. Michael Medical Center, increasing capacity at the premier hospital of the peninsulas by 74 beds.

2026 OUTSTANDING SERVICE AWARD

Allan Peterson

The WEDA Awards Committee also opted to present a special Award for Outstanding Service to Allan Peterson.

Allan was nominated by Rhyanne Berryman, Director of Business & Community Engagement with the Grant County Economic Development Council. Allan is the former Grant/Adams County Certified Business Advisor and Certified International Trade Expert for the Washington Small Business Development Center. Allan began his career as an Advisor with the SBDC in 2004, working out of an office at Big Bend Community College before moving into the Grant County EDC office in 2011. As the program grew, the EDC office later housed an additional advisor, and Allan transitioned into the role of Certified Global Business and Export Professional.

The nomination outlines that throughout his career, Allan has been an exceptional advocate for small businesses and economic development in Grant County. Over his 21-year career, he facilitated countless meetings, webinars, classes, and trainings, and helped his clients access more than \$63 million in capital. He has also led numerous overseas trade missions, connecting local businesses to international buyers and new markets. Allan officially retired from the Small Business Development Center in December 2025. He is a true champion of economic development.

Said Jon Smith, Executive Director of the Yakima County Development Association & WEDA Awards Committee Member, "I had the privilege of working closely with Allan during my time at the Grant County Economic Development Council, where he served as an SBDC advisor beginning in 2004. From the outset, Allan exemplified what effective economic development looks like at the ground level: patient, technically skilled, collaborative, and relentlessly focused on helping small businesses succeed."

Smith furthered, "Allan's influence extended well beyond individual business support and export missions. The close working partnership between the SBDC and the Grant County EDC during this period became a model for effective collaboration between business advising and economic development organizations. That experience directly informed my later advocacy for stronger coordination between WEDA and the statewide SBDC network. The resulting collaboration has benefited both networks and strengthened Washington's overall economic development capacity, particularly in rural communities. The fabric of this ecosystem has been threatened with recent funding cuts, and I think it's an important moment that we recognize that we all need to keep working for the standard of collaboration and support that Allan modeled."

Berryman stated, "Allan Peterson's impact on communities, entrepreneurs, and the broader economic development ecosystem in Washington State is both deep and enduring."

2026 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROJECT OF THE YEAR – BUSINESS RECRUITMENT

This award celebrates the successful creation or completion of a creative, economically significant, and/or model project in a community or region. Factors that may influence the selection include the extent of the economic impact this project has on the community, the development of partnerships, innovation, originality, whether the project or program can be duplicated as a "best practice," and whether the project or program appears to be cost-effective.

This year there were two awardees in this category due to the excellent caliber of both nominations.

2026 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROJECT OF THE YEAR – BUSINESS RECRUITMENT

ROCKWOOL North America – Port of Walla Walla

ROCKWOOL North America’s decision to locate its newest US manufacturing facility in Walla Walla County represents one of the most significant business recruitment successes for both the Port of Walla Walla and the State of Washington. The project was recognized with the Washington Economic Development Association’s (WEDA) Project of the Year Award – Business Recruitment, which honors projects demonstrating innovation, sustainability, effective use of community assets and measurable economic impact in a community.

ROCKWOOL, a global leader in stone wool insulation and building materials, selected the Port’s Wallula Gap Business Park following a competitive, multi-state site selection process. The 1,280-acre Wallula Gap Business Park is zoned for heavy and mixed industrial use and sits adjacent to U.S. Highway 12, the region’s primary east–west freight corridor. The site offered the industrial land, rail connectivity, water capacity and proximity to U.S. Highway 12—key infrastructure needed to support a world-class manufacturing operation. Years of investment by the Port in infrastructure and industrial site readiness positioned the community to compete successfully for a major global manufacturer.

In March 2024, ROCKWOOL acquired 250 acres within the business park to construct a manufacturing facility utilizing advanced electric melting technology to produce stone wool insulation products that improve energy efficiency, fire resilience and building durability. The project represents an estimated \$175 million local, private investment during construction, supporting more than 670 construction jobs. Once operational, the facility will employ approximately 125 people and generate an estimated \$8.6 million in annual earnings and \$2.4 million in state and local tax revenue. Beyond direct employment, the project is producing secondary economic activity through construction spending, engineering, and local procurement while helping diversify Walla Walla County’s economy beyond agriculture and tourism.

“At ROCKWOOL, we believe strongly in building sustainable industry, creating well-paying jobs, and being a responsible partner wherever we operate,” said ROCKWOOL’s Wallula Director of Operations Jørgen Amtoft. “To have those values recognized at the state level is both humbling and encouraging.”

“ROCKWOOL’s investment in Walla Walla County demonstrates what can happen when rural communities prepare the infrastructure, industrial land and partnerships needed to compete for global industry,” said Patrick Reay, Executive Director of the Port of Walla Walla. “This recognition reflects years of planning and collaboration and will create lasting economic opportunity for our region.”

2026 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROJECT OF THE YEAR – BUSINESS RECRUITMENT

Avalanche Energy FusionWERX – Port of Benton

In his nomination of the Avalanche project, Karl Dye, CEO of TRIDEC stated that, “The Port of Benton has demonstrated exceptional leadership, vision, and commitment to advancing cutting-edge clean energy innovation, making it a highly deserving candidate for recognition.”

The Avalanche Energy FusionWERX project is located in Richland. The Port of Benton had a long-term lease with a company that had built a clean room and air-handling equipment to facilitate the development of a tritium filtering system that was proposed for the clean-up of the Fukushima Nuclear site. After the development was complete, the company prepared to end its lease and to remove the tenant improvements at the property, which included the Tritium-safe clean room.

Upon learning of this facility, the team at Avalanche Energy, a leading developer of compact fusion machines, engaged with the Port of Benton and the previous tenant about how to lease the facility and retain the clean

room. Tritium is the fuel used in fusion reactions and safely handling and storing it are key to the development of new fusion technologies. Under the lease, the previous tenant would have to remove all of the improvements, including the clean room, in order to end the lease without any penalties. The Port brought all parties together and with some financial commitments from Avalanche and the Associate Development Organization, TRIDEC, let the previous tenant out of their lease and signed a new lease with Avalanche.

Dye furthered, “Throughout the project, the Port of Benton has consistently shown a proactive and solutions-oriented approach. By facilitating an agreement with all parties, permitting coordination, and long-term planning, the Port reduced barriers to innovation and accelerated project timelines. This level of engagement reflects a deep understanding of the unique needs of advanced energy research organizations and a willingness to adapt traditional development models to support transformative technologies. Beyond infrastructure support, the Port of Benton’s broader economic development mission has amplified the impact of the FusionWERX project. Its commitment to workforce development, regional partnerships, and sustainable growth aligns seamlessly with Avalanche’s goal of delivering clean, scalable, and commercially viable fusion energy. Together, this partnership strengthens the Tri-Cities region’s reputation as a national hub for energy innovation and scientific excellence.”

The Port of Benton’s leadership has also demonstrated foresight in recognizing fusion energy as a strategic opportunity for long-term economic resilience and environmental stewardship. By supporting projects like FusionWERX, the Port is helping position Washington State at the forefront of the global clean energy transition while fostering high-quality jobs and attracting world-class talent to the region.

Said Hawkins DeFrance, Director of Regulatory Affairs & Safety for Avalanche Energy, “The Port of Benton’s support for FusionWERX demonstrates strong leadership in innovation and economic growth. We’re proud to partner with them to bring the first commercial fusion company to the Tri-Cities.”

2026 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROJECT OF THE YEAR – BUSINESS RETENTION/EXPANSION

Portal Space Systems – Economic Alliance Snohomish County

This award celebrates the successful creation or completion of a creative, economically significant, and/or model project in a community or region. The project could be one that has retained jobs, was particularly difficult to achieve, was extraordinarily competitive, had multiple partners or contributed to community well-being.

The Portal Space Systems expansion in Bothell is a strong example of business retention and expansion achieved through coordinated public–private partnership and strategic use of state and local economic development tools. Economic Alliance Snohomish County (EASC) played a central role in supporting Portal’s decision to expand in Washington and ensuring the project moved forward quickly and competitively.

Portal Space Systems is a rapidly growing space manufacturing company focused on next-generation satellite systems and in-space mobility. As the company planned a new high-rate satellite production facility, it evaluated multiple locations nationally. EASC worked closely with Portal throughout the site evaluation and expansion process and led the application to the Governor’s Strategic Reserve Fund. This effort required close coordination with the Governor’s Office and the Washington State Department of Commerce, as well as alignment with local partners, to position the project successfully within a competitive decision-making timeline.

The expansion represents a significant investment in Snohomish County and Washington State. Portal plans to establish a manufacturing facility capable of producing up to 48 satellites annually. At full buildout, the project is expected to support up to 700 jobs across engineering, technical, and advanced manufacturing roles. These positions span a wide range of high-skill occupations and will contribute to long-term economic growth, workforce

development, and local and state tax base. The project also reinforces Washington's leadership in aerospace, defense, and space systems manufacturing.

EASC served as the central convener among many partners, helping ensure consistent communication, coordinated advocacy, and alignment around project goals, timelines, and impacts. Beyond securing the expansion, EASC continues to work with Portal and regional workforce partners as the company ramps up hiring. This ongoing collaboration focuses on connecting local talent to emerging job opportunities, aligning workforce and training resources with Portal's needs, and supporting the development of a skilled labor pipeline capable of sustaining long-term growth.

The Portal Space Systems expansion demonstrates how effective economic development happens in practice: through business retention, trusted relationships, and coordinated use of state and local tools. The project delivers substantial capital investment, significant job creation, and strengthened industry capacity for Washington State, and it represents extremely well the type of outcome-driven, partnership-based economic development.

"From day one, Economic Alliance Snohomish County and the broader regional community have done more than welcome us — they have shown up, leaned in and actively supported our expansion. As we expand our facilities and create more high-skilled jobs in the region, that kind of collaboration makes a real difference. Portal Space Systems is proud to be putting down long-term roots in a community that believes in what we are building," said Neil Balava, Director of Supply Chain and Procurement, Portal Space Systems.

"This recognition reflects what is possible when partners across our region work together with a shared goal," said Ray Stephanson, President & CEO of Economic Alliance Snohomish County. "By aligning industry, government and workforce resources, we can help create high-wage jobs, strengthen our economy and build opportunity for families throughout our community."

The project was supported through strong regional collaboration, including partners at the City of Bothell, Snohomish County, Workforce Snohomish and the Pacific Northwest Aerospace Alliance (PNAA).

2026 INNOVATION IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AWARD

Lacey MakerSpace

This award recognizes that not all economic development projects are alike. In fact, there are frequently projects that happen or programs that are developed that do not include the "deal" that economic developers typically consider as a success. WEDA will recognize innovative programs, projects and partnerships that are pioneering, novel and groundbreaking. WEDA recognizes that communities and individuals are doing state-of-the-artwork to further the field of economic development. It may be the attraction of a world-class event that made a significant economic impact on a community, an atypical alliance of groups who may have never worked together before or the creation of a program that significantly improves a community's ability to attract investment.

This year, WEDA awarded the Innovation in Economic Development award to Lacey MakerSpace, a community-focused innovation hub resulting from collaboration between the City of Lacey, Saint Martin's University, and Thurston Economic Development Council. The MakerSpace was developed to support and promote "makers" of all ages and skill levels, support technical training for the region's employment base, and serve as a central hub of the region's entrepreneurial ecosystem. The facility, located on the campus of Saint Martin's University, is an 8,000+ square-foot space equipped with advanced fabrication and design tools, offering hands-on learning opportunities in a welcoming, collaborative environment.

Open to the public through memberships and classes, LMS supports artists, entrepreneurs, and makers of all skill levels, offering pathways into woodworking, welding, textiles, 3D printing, digital design, and more. LMS demonstrates innovation through strategic partnerships with the local Chamber of Commerce, Workforce Development Council, Thurston County Solid Waste, and workforce training organizations, including AJAC Advanced Manufacturing Apprenticeships and ANEW. AJAC's manufacturing training and skill-building cohorts lead directly to employment, with students experiencing a 90% placement rate. These programs meet the needs of individuals seeking advanced training, leading directly to employment opportunities.

LMS serves as a critical core of the entrepreneurial ecosystem by being the catalyst for new and emerging businesses to test, prototype, and develop products for their markets, whether as startups or as businesses expanding into new markets. During 2025, LMS supported over 100 businesses as they developed their products and tested their manufacturing processes, helping to launch dozens of new businesses into the local economy.

Open to the public, LMS has over 425 active members who use a range of machinery and tools to create, fabricate, and design items ranging from wooden cutting boards to operational robots. In addition to workforce training courses, LMS offered over 350 classes and workshops in 2025, including specialized programming for military-affiliated individuals through Arts WA's Wellness Arts and the Military program. The facility mobilized over 2,300 volunteer hours in 2025 alone, demonstrating strong community engagement. Open to ages 12 and up, members come from as far away as Vancouver in the south, Seattle in the north, North Bend on the east, and the coastal communities in the west.

This unique facility results from strategic vision by the City of Lacey (seeking to support the employment sector and citizens of the community), Saint Martin's University (seeking to expand opportunities for academic success and launching of students' business concepts), the EDC (seeking to build a robust entrepreneurial ecosystem) and community business leaders (seeking to create a vibrant and inclusive community).

Opening in 2019 just prior to the COVID lockdown, LMS immediately demonstrated its innovative capacity by pivoting to emergency response. Collaborating with volunteers from around the region and other local nonprofits, LMS facilitated the fabrication of over 17,000 face shields and masks during the early days of the pandemic when PPE was in critical shortage. This rapid response showcased LMS's ability to adapt advanced fabrication tools to meet urgent community needs while building the collaborative networks that continue to drive regional innovation today.

Michael Cade, Executive Director of the Thurston Economic Development Council identified the impact and importance of the LMS to the entrepreneurial ecosystem, "The Lacey MakerSpace has become in a short while a location where artists, hobbyists, professionals and engineers can come to and develop/design new innovative products. The facility has become a launching point for businesses – both as startups and as expanding products."

2026 AWARD FOR INCLUSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT South Sound BIPOC

This award recognizes economic development organizations/entities/individuals that have made strides in improving the diversity, equity and inclusion within their work, communities or organizations. WEDA will recognize innovative programs, projects and partnerships that are pioneering, groundbreaking and/or novel.

The winner of WEDA's 2026 Award for Inclusive Economic Development is South Sound BIPOC. This effort, launched by the Thurston Chamber of Commerce in early 2019 was created specifically to build a strong and inclusive economy and ensuring that businesses operated, owned by people of color had a leadership position

in the long term strategy for an inclusive economy. The mission is to grow a prosperous economy and a vibrant community by connecting people, ideas and resources. This means creating an equitable infrastructure for the BIPOC community. In the last several years, the SS BIPOC has:

- Built a thriving community of 498 members since launch
- Held monthly virtual roundtables (Fourth Tuesday of each month, 11am-12pm) with consistent engagement
- Hosted quarterly in-person networking events fostering deeper connections
- Created a free online business directory providing visibility for BIPOC-owned businesses and community resources

The program addresses a critical gap in the South Sound region by creating an inclusive ecosystem where BIPOC entrepreneurs can access resources, build networks, and grow their businesses. The South Sound BIPOC was formed out of need to support people and business from a little bit different approach or angle.

Said Thurston Chamber of Commerce CEO David Schaffert, “Creating trust and being able to meet SSBPIPOC members where they are at has been instrumental in providing services and assessing needs. The fundamentals of convening (networking), technical business support by guest presenters (education), referrals to ongoing business support partners, organizations and developing marketing opportunities. This has been the fundamental base of efforts. It has been remarkable that this somewhat simple approach has created positive leverage and positive outcomes for participants.”

“South Sound BIPOC started with two BIPOC business owners in 2019 asking a simple question: ‘Where do we go to find each other?’ That conversation became the seed for South Sound BIPOC, and today, that seed has grown into a community that is stronger, more connected, and more visible than it was years ago,” said Mia Ong, Education and Partnership Development Manager, “Our programming is driven by what our entrepreneurs need. Our free directory, roundtables, workshops, and networking events provide visibility and market access, while our Annual Expo offers real exposure and real connections that help stimulate economic activity.”

2026 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AWARD FOR ECONOMIC RESPONSE & RECOVERY Small Business Readiness Playbook – Seattle Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce

This award recognizes economic development organizations/entities/individuals that have made innovative efforts to support economic response and recovery, whether it is a natural disaster recovery, a flood, fire or other significant disaster or perhaps a significant public safety crisis. WEDA will recognize innovative programs, projects and partnerships that are pioneering, groundbreaking and/or novel.

The winner of the Economic Development Award for Economic Response & Recovery is the Small Business Readiness Playbook, a project of the Seattle Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce. The Small Business Readiness Playbook is A Practical Guide for Mega-Event Preparation in Washington State.

The Playbook was developed as a statewide economic response and recovery tool to help small businesses prepare for, withstand and benefit from large-scale disruptions and opportunities associated with mega events, most notably the 2026 FIFA World Cup™. As the official small business liaison partner to the Local Organizing Committee (SeattleFWC26), the Seattle Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce created the Playbook through its Community Business Connector (CBC) initiative to provide clear, practical and equitable guidance for businesses navigating sudden demand surges, operational disruptions, staffing challenges, public safety considerations, and regulatory complexity.

Designed as an evergreen, scalable resource, the Playbook supports not only World Cup readiness but long-term business resilience across Washington State. In addition to using the Playbook as a guide for statewide business readiness, King County businesses can access a free, one-stop business support web portal to manage relationships with technical advisors, trusted connectors, and business-led communities. The Chamber and its partners have delivered a foundational tool that serves as a starting point for small businesses, technical advisors, and trusted connectors to get ready to do business in Washington State.

Mega events create uneven economic impacts for small businesses. While some benefit from increased foot traffic, others experience disruptions from street closures, staffing shortages, supply chain issues, compliance risks, and post-event demand drops. These challenges are magnified for BIPOC-, immigrant-, rural-, and micro-businesses that face cultural, linguistic, and geographic barriers to information and resources. Washington State lacked a centralized, statewide tool that explained how mega events work, how to prepare operationally, and how to connect with trusted business support systems before, during, and after such events.

The Playbook responds by:

- Translating complex event, permitting and operational requirements into plain-language guidance
- Providing real-world case studies from Washington and peer cities
- Clarifying roles of federal, state, county and city agencies
- Offering checklists and timelines for business readiness and day-of operations
- Connecting businesses to technical assistance providers, chambers, CBOs and public agencies
- Serving as the foundation for a free, one-stop CBC business support web portal in King County that enables ongoing engagement beyond a single event

This approach ensures the Playbook functions both as a rapid-response readiness guide and a long-term recovery and resilience tool. The Playbook strengthens Washington’s business support ecosystem by equipping small businesses and partners to respond to economic shocks and support long-term growth.

Importantly back to the theme of resilience, this project is innovative because it:

- Treats mega events as both economic disruption and recovery opportunity
- Bridges economic development, emergency preparedness and small business ecosystems
- Centers equity, accessibility, and statewide consistency
- Moves beyond one-time response by embedding the Playbook into a living digital support network
- Is intentionally designed to evolve alongside emerging challenges, including AI adoption, workforce shifts, and future mega events

“We’re grateful for this recognition, which really reflects the shared commitment of many partners across Washington who care deeply about the success of our small businesses. The Small Business Readiness Playbook brings together practical tools and guidance to help businesses prepare for uncertainty and continue growing. It’s a reminder that when we work together across sectors and communities, we can build a more resilient and opportunity-driven economy for our state,” said Joe Nguyen, CEO, Seattle Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce.

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About the Washington Economic Development Association (WEDA)

As Washington State’s *only* trade association laser-focused on economic development, WEDA is committed to recovering, retaining, recruiting and expanding jobs and re-investment in Washington State. WEDA members include economic development organizations, cities, counties, ports, tribes, businesses, education/workforce and community-based organizations that prioritize economic development.