

Cleveland County Economic Development Coalition Receives 2025 Excellence in Economic Development Silver Award

IEDC's Excellence Awards honor economic development organizations and other entities and programs that demonstrate exemplary performance in the profession

NORMAN, OK, UNITED STATES, August 20, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Cleveland County Economic Development Coalition (CCEDC) has received the 2025 Excellence in Economic Development Silver Award from the [International Economic Development Council](#) (IEDC). The

award was bestowed for CCEDC's work in the "Best Use of Federal Resources" category that impacted between 200,000 and 500,000 residents. President and CEO Lawrence McKinney will be honored at the IEDC 2025 Annual Conference in Detroit, Michigan, September 14-17.

“

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Lawrence McKinney

“The Cleveland County Coalition is leading the field of excellence in economic development with its talent attraction and workforce development program. This award shines a national spotlight on the Coalition's commitment to its community and showcases the significant impact of economic development,” said Nathan Ohle, IEDC President and CEO. “IEDC is honored to present this award to the Cleveland County Coalition to celebrate both their leadership and innovation in the field.”

The specific project for which CCEDC was honored, “Workforce Development AI Talent Attraction Pipeline,” comprises four initiatives. The first and largest is the creation of the Oklahoma Aviation Academy High School in partnership with Norman Public Schools, the Moore Norman Technology Center, and the University of Oklahoma. Upon graduation, students become certified pilots, air traffic controllers, drone operators, or aircraft mechanics. With CCEDC's full



CCEDC logo

support, the community passed a \$33 million bond issue to leverage \$20 million in federal resources, fully funding the construction of the school to be built on the University of Oklahoma's Max Westheimer Airport.

The second initiative in the project is the purchase and renovation of the 18,000 square foot Center for Entrepreneurial Innovation, which will house CCEDC's state-certified incubator Startup 405, the Cleveland County Centurion Accelerator, and the Boyd Street Venture Studio, as well as dozens of entrepreneurs and service providers. CCEDC invested \$3.3 million privately to leverage \$3.2 million in federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds provided by the City of Norman and Cleveland County Commissioners.



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The project's third initiative is the development of a state-of-the-art, AI-enabled workforce/employer portal to connect nationwide talent with county businesses. CCEDC leveraged the knowledge gained from a National Science Center Foundation grant to apply for and receive an \$800,000 ARPA investment. The platform, under development by incubator tenant Brio Data Group, includes a humanoid AI robot and will raise the bar in how economic development organizations deliver value to their community stakeholders.

The fourth initiative is the construction of mountain biking trails at Lake Thunderbird, Oklahoma's most visited state park, as a means of enhancing the area's quality of life to attract and retain workforce talent. CCEDC, in partnership with VisitNorman and Rock Solid Trails of Arkansas is using \$1 million in federal funds, provided by the Cleveland County Commissioners, to construct the trails.

In total, CCEDC raised nearly \$36 million in private/community funds to secure \$25 million in federal funds in support of all four initiatives.

One of IEDC's judges said of CCEDC's project, "I really like how this effort was able to address multiple initiatives between industry-specific education, entrepreneurship and incubators, workforce development and attraction, and quality of life and tourism aspects."

"We're honored by IEDC's acknowledgement of the role we've been able to play in building a comprehensive workforce and talent program for Cleveland County," said CCEDC President and CEO Lawrence McKinney, who was just honored in February as America's [Economic Developer of the Year](#). "I'd especially like to acknowledge the crucial support and leadership of our Board of Directors, 2023 Chairman Patrick Grace of Oklahoma Electric Cooperative, 2024 Chairman David Nimmo of Chickasaw Nation Industries, and 2025 Chairman Matt Clouse of Valliance Bank. Our private sector leaders and our Cleveland County public partners have mastered the art of collaboration and coalition building to ensure economic prosperity for the future."

About CCEDC

The Cleveland County Economic Development Coalition represents the 3rd largest county in the state, as well as the 3rd and 7th largest cities, and is dedicated to improving the quality of life of Cleveland County residents through the creation and retention of quality jobs. Based in Cleveland County, Oklahoma, and established in 1996 as the Norman Economic Development Coalition, CCEDC is a joint effort of 100 private-sector "Sooner Centurions", the University of Oklahoma, the cities of Norman, Moore, Noble, Lexington, and south OKC, as well Moore-Norman Technology Center, and the Cleveland County Commission. Learn more at <https://www.SelectClevelandCounty.com/>

About IEDC

The International Economic Development Council (IEDC) is a non-profit, non-partisan membership organization serving economic developers. With thousands of members, IEDC is the largest organization of its kind. Economic developers promote economic well-being and quality of life for their communities by creating, retaining, and expanding jobs that facilitate growth, enhance wealth, and provide a stable tax base. From public to private, rural to urban, and local to international, IEDC's members engage in a full range of economic development practices. Given the breadth of economic development work, our members are employed in various settings, including local, state, provincial, and federal governments, public-private partnerships, chambers of commerce, universities, and a variety of other institutions. When we succeed, our members create high-quality jobs, develop vibrant communities, and improve the quality of life in their regions. Learn more at <https://www.iedconline.org/>.

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