

Gov. Pritzker Announces \$160 Million In Federal Funding For Great Lakes Water Innovation Engine

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CHICAGO - Governor JB Pritzker today announced that a Chicago-area water innovation hub, Current, has been selected to receive a \$160 million innovation grant from the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF) Regional Innovation Engine program for their Great Lakes ReNEW initiative. ReNEW, which was backed by six Great Lakes States, is also supported by Argonne National Laboratory, the University of Chicago,

and over fifty other partner organizations and focuses on sustainable water innovation solutions.

“The Great Lakes are a vital natural resource for the health, wealth, and security of our entire nation,” said Governor JB Pritzker. “That’s why I’m thrilled that Current was selected to receive this federal award that will help transform our Great Lakes region. Thanks to investments like these, our top-tier workforce, and our industrial resources, we’re leading the clean water and energy revolution.”

Current, a water innovation nonprofit, pioneers innovative solutions to water issues in the 21st century with a focus on coordinating collaboration between corporations, government entities, advocates, and other stakeholders to streamline complex processes. The focus of ReNEW’s application was removing forever chemicals, including PFAS, from the water supply to ensure long-term safe water consumption for the Great Lakes Region. Under ReNEW’s proposal, chemicals and minerals removed from wastewater would also be repurposed by American manufacturers for battery production and other materials-heavy products.

Beyond research, ReNEW will also connect partners across workforce development systems, from community-based organizations to credentialing programs, community colleges and universities to provide training and careers for individuals most affected by joblessness and systemic barriers to participation.

This is the most recent of several large federal grants that Illinois has received during Governor Pritzker’s administration. The Midwest Microelectronics Consortium Hub and the Silicon Crossroads Microelectronics Commons Hub both also received significant grants and are spearheaded by Illinois universities. Illinois also successfully completed phase one of applications for tech hub and Recompete economic revitalization grants last year, streamlining future applications and advancing Illinois-based projects to the next round of competition.

The NSF engine program was launched to spur economic growth in regions traditionally not considered part of the technology boom of the last several decades. ReNEW was one of 10 groups from across the United States to be chosen as an NSF Engine from the inaugural class of submissions. It was selected from 16 finalists, 188 invited proposals, and more than 700 initial submissions. Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin supported the application. Illinois has committed \$2 million in state funding to the program in addition to the NSF award.

"I'm so proud of the region for this win," said Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle. "This is a win not just for clean water and climate globally, but also a win for regional cooperation locally."

“This engine will be anchored in Chicago, which is becoming a national epicenter for clean water innovation,” said Mayor Brandon Johnson. “I want to congratulate Current, the University of Chicago, and Argonne National Laboratory for their ambition and ingenuity, which is going to create an untold number of jobs right here throughout the lifecycle of this grant.”

“Waste has no place in this world of increasing water and resource scarcity,” said Alaina Harkness, executive director of Current and principal investigator for Great Lakes ReNEW. “Our engine will find new ways to recover and reuse water, energy, nutrients, and critical materials from our water. These innovations will create economic opportunities for residents of our region; help strengthen our domestic supply chain for clean energy technologies; and address water quality and security issues around the world.”

“We have all the research and commercialization strengths here in the Great Lakes region to become a water innovation superhighway,” said Junhong Chen, co-principal investigator of Great Lakes ReNEW, Professor at The Pritzker School of Molecular Engineering at the University of Chicago and Lead Water Strategist at Argonne National Laboratory. “Now we can start building it.”