



## CULTIVATE WHAT'S NEXT

The 518 Collective is where innovation takes root. A foundation for founders, farmers and industry – the first of its kind in West Central Illinois. Where ideas gain traction, partnerships thrive and the next advances in ag tech break through. From concept to solution, it all happens here. The 518 Collective will enhance our region's entrepreneurial landscape by offering a launchpad for technology startups in the rapidly evolving agricultural technology sector.

Powered by Sandburg's educational strength, deep industry partnerships and trusted community connections, The 518 Collective will cultivate an ecosystem where citizens, organizations and businesses can thrive. It will be a place where ideas take root, businesses take shape and futures are built.

The proposed capital improvements will transform this space into a vibrant hub of creativity, discovery and growth. Equipped with the tools, technologies and facilities that early stage companies need to move from concept to commercialization, the 518 Collective will remove barriers and accelerate potential.

What sets this initiative apart is its wraparound support: mentorship, training, resource sharing and connections to the broader innovation economy. This dynamic environment will dramatically increase the likelihood of success for startups and small businesses.

The 518 Collective embodies the very spirit of the Tech Incubator Enhancement Grant Program – strengthening Illinois' tech network, fortifying the resilience of our entrepreneurial ecosystem and advancing startups in agriculture and technology that will shape our future.



## SCOPE

The 518 Collective will build on Sandburg's existing services and regional partnerships, serving as a hub for technology-focused startups and entrepreneurs in West Central Illinois, with a primary focus on ag tech startups. The 518 Collective is a nod to Carl Sandburg College District 518, which serves parts of 10 western Illinois counties, and is meant to invoke the collaborative spirit of tech incubators and align the space with the college's role in serving all district residents with educational and workforce development opportunities.

The 518 Collective will provide physical workspace, workforce training, business development services, mentorship and networking opportunities to help early stage companies succeed. The incubator will fill a critical need in Sandburg's wide rural district, where agriculture is a leading industry, but no business incubators exist to serve the up-and-coming ag technicians and businesses projected to grow the industry.

## GOALS

### **Empower student entrepreneurs.**

By creating a hub specifically tailored to agricultural technology, students will have real-world opportunities to explore advanced ag-related projects, interact with mentors and leverage cutting-edge equipment to launch or refine their own business ideas. This not only will deepen hands-on learning but also inspire future innovators to remain in – and serve – our region.

### **Stimulate workforce development.**

As a dedicated tech incubator, the 518 Collective will spur job creation and skill-building opportunities in next-generation agriculture, food processing and other high-growth fields. By collaborating with regional businesses, economic development organizations and local workforce boards, the incubator will be pivotal in helping our students and local jobseekers gain competitive, future-focused skill sets.

### **Foster collaboration and community partnerships.**

The 518 Collective will function as a catalyst for bridging partnerships between the college, private investors, local entrepreneurs and nearby industry stakeholders. Hosting community-driven events, networking opportunities and training sessions will ensure our district youth, alumni and all citizens can tap into new resources, explore entrepreneurial pathways and benefit from shared expertise.

### **Enhance regional economic vitality.**

Our district's strong ties to agriculture make it the perfect setting for a state-of-the-art agricultural technology incubator. Upgraded facilities and modern equipment will strengthen the entrepreneurial ecosystem, create a robust pipeline of talent for local businesses, and help attract new enterprises seeking a collaborative space focused on agricultural innovation.

### **Support underserved and low-income communities.**

This program will broaden outreach to rural, underserved and first-generation students, helping them access education and resources critical to launching or joining high-growth startups. The 518 Collective's emphasis on workforce readiness and inclusivity aligns with the values and mission upheld by both Sandburg and the Foundation.

### **Learn more.**

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