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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Industrial Commons Wins U.S. National Science Foundation Regional Innovation Engine Award

Innovative Economic Development Organization Will Lead the "North Carolina Textile Innovation and Sustainability Engine"; Could receive up to $160M over 10 Years

Morganton, NC: Economic development organization The Industrial Commons (TIC) and its partners have been recognized by the U.S. National Science Foundation and selected as a Regional Innovation Engine. The organization will lead the "North Carolina Textile Innovation and Sustainability Engine" (NCTISE) alongside several textile related institutions and educational partners. The award, which can be up to $160M over 10 years, will bolster sustainability in the textile sector throughout North Carolina, upstate South Carolina, eastern Tennessee and southwestern Virginia.

"On behalf of The Industrial Commons, we are amazed, honored and excited to receive an inaugural NSF Engines award," said Molly Hemstreet, TIC Co-Executive Director. "Although this industry has seen its fair share of challenges, we see so much potential for it to drive economic change in our region. This award will allow us to build on our legacy industries and depth of innovation to create opportunity for workers and our communities. We are indebted to our amazing Engine partners that made this possible and we look forward to scaling our impact and strengthening our industry."

The Engine will advance the nation's capacity for innovation in textiles through a lens of environmental sustainability and with an eye toward circularity, positioning the engine as a global leader in the sector. Through research and development, translation of innovation to impact and workforce development efforts, the Engine aims to disrupt the $96B textile industry.

"North Carolina's textile industry bolsters our economy, brings good-paying jobs to the state and is a big part of the reason why North Carolina is the manufacturing hub of the Southeast," said Governor Cooper. "This award will support The Industrial Commons and their critical work leading cross-industry collaboration to develop an innovative and sustainable approach to textile production that will move North Carolina and the country toward a clean energy future."

The Industrial Commons has teamed up with several textile, workforce and entrepreneurial support organizations for the program. Core Partners, which will be critical to the program's success and will receive funding from the award include: NC State University, Wilson College of Textiles, the Manufacturing Solutions Center at Catawba Valley Community College, Gaston Textile Technology Center at Gaston Community College and Western Piedmont Community College. In addition to the Core Partners, the Leadership Team also includes the NC Department of Commerce Office of Science Technology and Innovation, NC Idea and RTI (Research Triangle Institute). RTI will lead the Engine's evaluation efforts.

"The inaugural NSF Engines awards demonstrate our enduring commitment to create opportunity everywhere and enable innovation anywhere," said NSF Director Sethuraman Panchanathan. "Through these NSF Engines, NSF aims to expand the frontiers of technology and innovation and spur economic growth across the nation through unprecedented investments in people and partners. NSF Engines hold significant promise to elevate and transform entire geographic regions into world-leading hubs of innovation."

With a potential NSF investment of nearly $1.6 billion over the next decade, the NSF Engines represents one of the single largest investments in place-based research and economic development in the nation's history - uniquely placing science and technology leadership as the central driver for regional economic competitiveness and job creation. The announcement delivers on the bipartisan priorities outlined in the "CHIPS and Science Act of 2022," which authorized the NSF Engines program with a focus on market-driven research and development, innovation, translation and workforce development.

In addition to pioneering innovative research in the sustainable textile space and translating that research through commercialization, the North Carolina Innovation and Sustainability Engine will explore the intersections of the textile sector with other adjacent sectors including aerospace, automotive, defense, agriculture and clean energy. The Engine will focus on inclusive and community-based economic development while also positioning the U.S. textile sector to be more globally competitive in the emerging textile circular economy. For TIC, this represents the largest single grant the organization has ever received. It builds on a 2023, $10M investment from the Appalachian Regional Commission's (ARC) ARISE program, which was funded by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

The Engine will offer several on-ramps for additional government and education partners as well as private sector companies to propose projects and become involved in the Engine. These will include: a Strategic Growth Fund, designed to provide low interest loans to entrepreneurs; a Research and Development mini-grant program, to fund new sustainability related Research & Development projects; and a Translation Trial Match Fund; to support scaling brands as they move through manufacturing readiness levels to integrate sustainable products into their offerings.

The Engines application and award process has taken nearly 18 months. The Industrial Commons first submitted a concept note in June 2022. After submission of a complete Letter of Intent and Proposal, TIC was advanced to the Semi-Finalist round, which included 32 organizations and a virtual site visit held in June 2023. TIC then advanced to the Finalist round,

where they became one of 16 organizations to host an in-person site visit. The site visit, held in October, brought together over 85 individuals to share in TIC's collective vision of a reinvigorated and revitalized textile sector representing 14 government and economic development organizations, eight education institutions and 25 private sector companies.

The award will officially begin in March 2024. The Engines program commits funding for the first two years of up to $15M with the possibility of an additional $145M over the remaining three to 10 years of the program. The Engine and its partners will be expected to leverage NSF's investment to spur additional private and public investments into the Engine and its activities. The Engine will conduct a search to name a CEO who will lead the entity alongside a Governance Board, to be established in the near future.

The Industrial Commons was supported by countless partners, organizations and individuals during the Engines process. They have deep gratitude to the members of the Leadership Team and everyone who attended the in-person site visit. They also express appreciation for the Just Transition Fund, which provided critical grant funds to offset the costs of grant and site visit preparation and execution.

Those interested in learning more or getting involved with the North Carolina Textile Innovation and Sustainability Engine (Proposal ID 2315305) should visit NCTISE.org.

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About The Industrial Commons:
The Industrial Commons is a 501(c)(3) founded in 2015. Their mission is to rebuild a diverse working class based on locally rooted wealth. They do this by founding and scaling employee owned social enterprises, creating industry networks and delivering a suite of workforce development and youth engagement programs. To learn more about TIC, visit www.theindustrialcommons.org.

About NSF Engines:
Launched by the NSF Directorate for Technology, Innovation and Partnerships in May 2022, the NSF Engines program uniquely harnesses the nation's science and technology research, development enterprise and regional-level resources. For more information, visit the NSF Engines program website.

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