



CREATE

Cultivating Resilient Entrepreneurs
and Transforming Economies

CREATE Entrepreneurship Summit Agenda **Cultivating **Resilient** Entrepreneurs and Transforming Economies** **Wednesday, August 13, 2025 | Middle Georgia State University**

8:30 am – Registration

9:00 am – Welcome to CREATE

Georgia Power Economic Development is excited to welcome community leaders and resource partners to the CREATE Entrepreneurship Summit. Elyse Davis, Statewide Regional Economic Development Manager kicks off today's event with insights from her nearly three decades of economic development experience.

9:15 am – Selling Small: Why Does Entrepreneurship Matter?

From the Georgia mountains, metro to coastline, entrepreneurs are shaping Georgia communities and powering the state's position as a top state to live, work, and learn. Scott Purvis, Regional Economic Development Manager, South Region, will provide the data and research you need to gain buy-in from stakeholders and residents when making the case for investing in small business growth for your towns and cities.

9:45 am – Auditing Your Entrepreneurship Ecosystem: What You Already Have and What You Need to Find or Create.

More than the people, programs, and places that support entrepreneurs, thriving ecosystems must collaborate effectively. Vanessa Wagner, Georgia Power Program Manager, will guide participants through a self-audit of their resources and share best practices that help your resource partners amplify their strengths.

10:30 am – Break – Resource Partner Expo

Attendees are encouraged to speak with resource partners in the expo area to find and create the partners they need to strengthen their own ecosystems.

10:45 am – The Entrepreneur's Experience

Soliciting feedback from existing business owners is an essential part of the ecosystem building process. Jessica Walden, President & CEO of the Greater Macon Chamber of Commerce will be sharing her experience as a Co-Owner and Operator of Rock Candy Tours as well hosting a "fireside chat" with local small businesses on their experiences starting and growing. Hear directly from entrepreneurs on what they need, want, and hope for when it comes to community support for small businesses.

11:45 am – Georgia Has Small business on its Mind.

Allen Fox, Director of Small Business Outreach with the Georgia Department of Economic Development will provide an overview of how the state currently supports small business

1:00 pm – I Didn't Know They Did *That*! Dive Deeper with Statewide Resource Partners to Discover Solutions Available to Entrepreneurs

Take a fresh look at the enhanced services that Georgia partners can provide your community's entrepreneurs. Beyond one-and-one coaching, this session dives into industry-specific resources and custom programs that you can partner with to accelerate the startup and growth of small businesses in your community.

- Allen Fox will facilitate this discussion with statewide resource partners that include:
- ACE - Tommie Beth Willis, Regional Director South Georgia
- FLEX - Melissa Dark, Executive Director
- SCORE - Matt McKenna, Principal at McKenna & Associates, SCORE Mentor
- University at Georgia, SBDC - David Canady, Business & Leadership Advisor

2:00 pm – You CAN Do This! Community Leaders and Entrepreneurship Programs Share How They Overcame Challenges to Start and Grow their Programs.

We've invited community leaders that are building rural, regional and metro-centric support centers and programs. Learn from them about getting started, overcoming hurdles like small staffs and limited budgets, forming strategic partnerships and more. David Nuckolls, Executive Director with the Georgia Centers of Innovation will help present case studies from:

- City of Hartwell Georgia - Jason Ford, Economic & Community Development Director
- The Lucas Center for Entrepreneurship - Ande Noktes, Executive Director
- The Greater Vidalia Center for Rural Entrepreneurship - Michele Johnson, President of the Greater Vidalia® Chamber
- SparkMacon - Sierra Marin, Director of Membership & Programming

3:30 pm Break – Resource Partner Expo

3:45 pm – Accelerate your Ecosystem with AI

Learn about the transformative power of artificial intelligence and how it can create and accelerate your small business growth strategy. Robbie Parks, UGA SBDC, provides the tools that community leaders are using to help entrepreneurs. Also, how to recognize what technology works for your community and when to pivot to alternative solutions.

4:15 pm – Survey and Wrap Up

4:30 pm – Program Concludes – Last Chance to Visit Resource Partners