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**For Immediate Release**

**SOUTHEAST SERVICE COOPERATIVE LAUNCHES FUTUREFORWARD™ PITCH COMPETITION TO SPOTLIGHT EDUCATOR INNOVATION**

ROCHESTER, MN  January 8, 2026 – Southeast Service Cooperative (SSC) is launching the FutureForward™ Pitch Competition, a new educator-centered initiative designed to surface innovative ideas that connect learning to careers, pathways, partners, and funding.

The FutureForward™ Pitch Competition introduces a new approach to grantmaking by combining a structured review process with a live, peer-driven pitch event. K–12 and post-secondary educators from across Minnesota are invited to submit a Letter of Interest (LOI) describing innovative STEM, career-connected learning, and/or career and technical education (CTE) ideas. Up to four finalists will be selected to pitch live during the STEM Educator Forum on February 11, 2026, where attendees will vote to determine award recipients.

Two projects will be awarded up to $10,000 each to support implementation.

Sarah Ness, Strategic Partnerships Manager at Southeast Service Cooperative, said “This model is designed to make innovation more visible and accessible. By shifting from a traditional, closed grant process to a live pitch format, we’re creating space for educators to share ideas, build partnerships, and learn from one another in real time.”

The competition is open to all K–12 educators across subject areas—not just CTE instructors—as well as counselors and instructional teams. Projects must include at least one industry or training partner to ensure learning experiences are career-connected and aligned to regional workforce needs.

In addition to awarding grant funds, the FutureForward™ Pitch Competition is designed to connect promising ideas to a broader ecosystem of partners and funders. Strong proposals may attract additional support beyond the competition, helping scale innovative practices across schools and regions.

The Letter of Interest submission phase opens January 5, 2026, and submissions are due January 26, 2026. Finalists will be notified on January 28, 2026. Full details, eligibility criteria, and application instructions are available at www.ssc.coop/ccls/pitch.

The FutureForward™ Pitch Competition reflects SSC’s commitment to advancing equitable access to career-connected learning, strengthening partnerships, and responsibly stewarding public funds to maximize impact for students.

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Contact Sarah Ness at sness@ssc.coop or 507-517-4559 for more information.

Interviews, photos, and videos available.
To learn more about Southeast Service Cooperative, visit www.ssc.coop.