

Gannon SBDC:

45 Years of Helping Entrepreneurs Build What's Next



Shown here is the Gannon SBDC team. Front row, from left: Director Maggie Horne, Business Consultant Mary Beth Wilcher, and Program/Project Coordinator Jeanne Best. Second row, from left: Historically Disadvantaged Business Assistance Consultant Jenessa Norton, Business Consultant Bill Dietz and Outreach Consultant Mike Blaurock.

For 45 years, the Gannon University Small Business Development Center (Gannon SBDC) has helped entrepreneurs turn ideas into businesses, supported established companies through challenges and growth, and strengthened the communities it serves.

Founded with a simple mission — help small businesses succeed — the Gannon SBDC has evolved into a regional resource for consulting, education, technology, innovation and connections. Its impact includes 20,966 clients served, 32,340 jobs impacted, \$681.9 million in capital formation, 2,838 training programs and 29,269 attendees.

Growing With Entrepreneurs

Gannon SBDC consultants support entrepreneurs across the business lifecycle, from developing a first idea to pursuing expansion, financing, succession or a new direction. Its programs have grown with the business environment, addressing business planning, finance, marketing, strategic planning, access to capital, technology, workforce issues, succession, manufacturing, e-commerce and digital marketing.

Through workshops, webinars and one-on-one consulting, the center helps business

owners understand their options, adapt and move forward — even during major disruptions such as economic downturns, rapid technological change and the COVID-19 pandemic.

From Business Assistance to Innovation

The Valley Fab Lab reflects the SBDC's expanding role. By providing access to 3D printing, laser cutting and digital fabrication, it brings together entrepreneurship, technology, creativity and hands-on learning. Entrepreneurs, students, makers and manufacturers can move ideas toward prototypes, products and potential businesses while building practical skills for the future.

Developing the Next Generation of Technology Talent

As technology has become essential to nearly every business, the Gannon SBDC has expanded assistance in websites, digital marketing, e-commerce and other technology needs.

The student-led Gannon SBDC Tech Team strengthens that work. Forty students have served on the team, gaining real-world client experience while helping small businesses improve their digital presence and technology capabilities. Entrepreneurs receive practical support, while students build professional skills and a deeper understanding of entrepreneurship.

Building an Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

Partnerships also have been central to the SBDC's impact. The center has worked with economic development organizations, chambers, financial

institutions, educational institutions, government agencies and community organizations. As the region's entrepreneurial ecosystem has grown, the SBDC has increasingly served as a connector, helping entrepreneurs find the right resources and relationships.

For example, the Underdog Founders Network is one of the most recent local partnerships between the Gannon University Small Business Development Center and Underdog BBQ. Launched on July 15, 2026, it creates a supportive community for local entrepreneurs, dreamers, and business owners to connect and share experiences.



45 Years — and Counting

The Gannon SBDC's history is ultimately a story of people: entrepreneurs who took risks, owners who persevered, consultants who shared expertise, students who gained experience, partners who strengthened the ecosystem and a university that recognized entrepreneurship's importance to regional economic vitality.

Looking ahead, artificial intelligence, automation, advanced manufacturing, workforce needs and an increasingly digital economy will bring new opportunities and questions. The SBDC's response will remain rooted in the principles that have guided it for 45 years: practical assistance, trusted relationships, innovation, education and a commitment to entrepreneurs.

For 45 years, the Gannon SBDC has helped build the region's entrepreneurial story. The next chapter is already underway.

COMPANY PROFILE

PENNSYLVANIA

S B D C

**Small Business Development Center
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Helping businesses start, grow, and prosper.

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The Small Business Development Center at Gannon University in Erie, Pennsylvania offers no-cost, confidential consulting services for small businesses and entrepreneurs