

# Industry Clusters

Industry Clusters are groups of firms working in the same or related industries, that gain a competitive advantage through scale, local proximity, and interdependence. The result is greater than the sum of its parts, where the cluster generates new growth that in turn strengthens the cluster further and leads to compound growth.



## The Benefits

Industry clusters produce a wide range of benefits for individual companies and for the industry as a whole.

- Diverse, local supply chain
- Robust labor market
- Tech and knowledge transfer
- Partnerships and collaborations
- Strengthened competitiveness
- Entrepreneur support
- Priority advocacy efforts
- Comprehensive infrastructure

# Polymer Industry Cluster Initiative

The Polymer Industry Cluster Initiative was launched at the start of 2021 to conduct a deeper examination of the region's polymer industry and develop a framework to achieve its full potential. The goal of this work is to elevate Northeast Ohio's polymer industry into a truly dynamic enterprise that is better positioned for strong, sustainable growth in an ever-changing global economy.

## Polymer Industry Cluster

The polymer industry is comprised of companies involved in the manufacture of chemicals, plastics, and elastomer products. The cluster is generally considered to be the collection of three different types of organizations operating within Northeast Ohio:



Polymer Industry Companies



Supply Chain of the Polymer Industry



Range of Polymer Support Organizations

### Contact

Brian Anderson, Senior Director of Research  
[banderson@greaterakronchamber.org](mailto:banderson@greaterakronchamber.org)





# 2021 Accomplishments and Milestones

## **Commissioned a Feasibility Study**

With the support of our staff, an industry expert conducted a year-long feasibility study. The study showed significant potential for creating an active polymer cluster and catalyzing substantial new economic growth. Although polymer industry assets are mostly concentrated in Akron MSA, significant ones are also found throughout the Canton, Cleveland and Youngstown areas. Thus, this polymer industry cluster can be considered a Northeast Ohio cluster.

## **Established a Polymer Industry Advisory Council**

The Polymer Industry Advisory Council was created with the aim of articulating an industry-led vision, set of goals, and growth strategy. The council currently includes over 35 representatives from more than 25 polymer-related companies and institutions in the region and is growing quickly. During the year, the council generated a shared vision, a mission statement and distinct development projects addressing challenges to achieving the cluster's goals. Moreover, it helped fill our cluster's gap in central leadership and activated ongoing cluster engagement.

## **Assessed Shared Industry Challenges**

The Polymer Industry Advisory Council created a list of shared challenges and ecosystem gaps that will advance collective problem solving with the significant potential of producing industry growth. To begin tackling these challenges on a deeper level in 2022, the council advanced plans to organize four working groups (in the following areas): workforce, research, start-ups/entrepreneur support, and supply chain.

## **Identified New Opportunities**

Through our own research and the work of the council, we identified global opportunities for the polymer industry cluster. We initiated distinct development projects, pursued opportunities for outside funding, designed a recommended roadmap for investment and engagement in the next few years and started to represent our local polymer industry cluster among other industry clusters in the country.

## **Finalist in the EDA Build Back Regional Challenge**

On behalf of Northeast Ohio's manufacturing sector and polymer industry, the GAC and MAGNET together with smaller partners submitted a collaborative proposal to the EDA's Build Back Better Regional Challenge. Ours was selected as one of 60 finalists out of 529 total submissions. As such, we received a \$500,000 grant for technical assistance in refining the final proposal, due March 2022.



# Polymer Industry Cluster Vision

Our vision for the cluster is a global focal point for the polymer industry and its supply chain, providing access to an unparalleled industry network of thought-leaders, producers, and innovators. We are committed to convening, connecting, and showcasing polymer companies because it enables growth and innovation, solidifying Northeast Ohio as a global center in Polymers.

## 2022 Plans

This year, an investment in the Polymer Cluster Initiative will allow us to continue convening on behalf of the cluster to solve shared problems, conduct research, and improve ecosystem navigation.

Expand PIAC from 25  
to 50+ advisors;  
facilitate monthly  
meetings

Create & facilitate  
working groups for key  
areas of development

Pursue opportunities for  
outside funding to drive  
growth in the cluster

Develop communication  
tools for the NEO Polymer  
Industry Cluster

Retain responsive, connected  
ecosystem POC to help  
accomplish goals

## Investing in the Future of Polymers

Building a cluster of any kind requires time, investment, and engagement. Our research indicates that there is high potential for a strong polymers cluster in this region, but the future is in the hands of industry leaders. We are seeking companies who are willing to invest financially, with their time and their expertise.



# NEO Build Back Better Regional Challenge

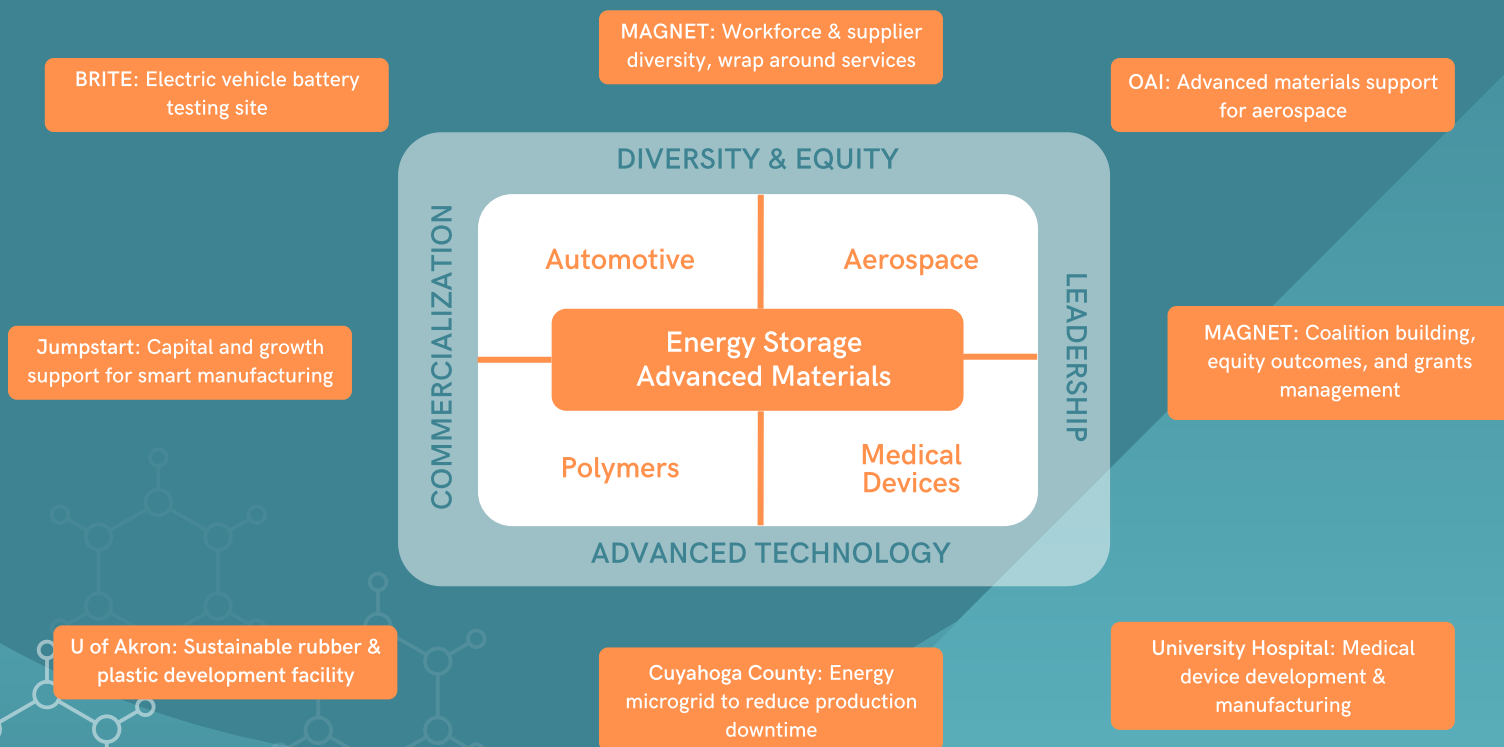
## What is the EDA Build Back Better Regional Challenge?

The Federal Economic Development Administration's (EDA) \$1 billion Build Back Better Regional Challenge (BBBRC) will award 20-30 regions grants of up to \$75 million each to catalyze new, sustainable, and equitable growth in their unique regional industry clusters.

## What is Northeast Ohio's proposal?

NEO's proposal, a collaboration between economic development drivers in support of the region's manufacturing sector and polymer industry, is comprised of 8 distinct but complementary development projects, seeking a total of \$75 million from EDA, to be paired with approximately \$35 million in matching funds from local sources. NEO's proposal was selected as one of 60 finalists in the BBBRC program out of 529 national submissions, and the only one out of 16 Ohio submissions. The second and final phase of the proposal is due March 15, 2022, and final awards will be announced in September 2022.

## Cluster Diagram





# NEO Build Back Better Regional Challenge

## Polymer R&D and Production Facility

The Polymer R&D and Production Facility (the "Facility") is a catalytic new infrastructure project to accelerate and support new materials innovations. The Facility and its equipment provide a chemical makerspace, enabling research labs to scale-up new materials and innovate alongside industry partners, to deliver their inventions at the scale industry requires in order to evaluate new materials for adoption. The Facility, a shared resource for industry and university research labs from all over the region, will help prevent innovations from being shelved and our region from missing out on their economic impact.

Economic impact is estimated at over \$200 million over the first 10 years of operation

Provides opportunities for hands-on workforce training in impactful production and testing roles

Increase production of valuable I.P., drive private investment, create jobs

## Polymer R&D and Production Facility Rendering (in progress)

