

MAY 2026  
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# ASIAN KALEIDOSCOPE

MN BIZ VISION



**Designing Beyond the  
Costume: An Interview  
with Designer Lex  
Liang**

**Calling America  
HOME Series with  
Dr. Cong Liu**

**THE WARM LOOP:  
The Heat Was  
Never Waste**



Asian Media Access

**This monthly e-Magazine is published by Asian Media Access and Multi Cultural Community Alliance to highlight the accomplishments of Asian American and Pacific Islanders' (AAPI) small businesses in MN.**

## Table of Contents

01~02	Introduction
03~05	AAPI Business Profile - Lex Liang
06~12	Calling America HOME
14~17	Center for Wellness Technology
18~22	What's News in IT
23~28	AAPI Community Updates
29~32	Business and Workforce Development Resources
33~34	Upcoming Training Events
35	Contact



## **Bridging Cultures, Building Futures: Minnesota's AAPI Business & Workforce Magazine**

Welcome to **MN Biz Vision: Asian Kaleidoscope**, a monthly e-magazine dedicated to empowering Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities across Minnesota. More than a publication, this platform uplifts AAPI entrepreneurs while advancing workforce pathways through the **Center for Wellness Technology** - a visionary hub that integrates Agricultural Technology, Multimedia Technology, and Wellness Technology into culturally grounded IT career opportunities.

### **AAPI Entrepreneurship & the Need for New Pathways**

AAPI entrepreneurs are vital to Minnesota's diverse business landscape, operating successful restaurants, grocery stores, salons, healthcare practices, consulting firms, and manufacturing businesses, etc.. While AAPIs comprise 6% of Minnesota's population, Asian-owned businesses represent only 3% of the state's small businesses—revealing persistent barriers to entrepreneurship. Yet these 15,500+ Asian-owned firms account for 35% of all minority-owned businesses in Minnesota, demonstrating the community's outsized economic impact and resilience. Targeted workforce development in specialized IT sectors can help bridge this entrepreneurship gap and create new pathways for community economic mobility and innovation.

## The Center for Wellness Technology: Our Dual Mission

At the heart of MN Biz Vision stands the Center for Wellness Technology, which unifies three high-impact technology tracks designed for AAPI youth, families, and entrepreneurs:

- **Agricultural Technology (AgTech):** Blending modern engineering with ancestral agricultural knowledge, learners explore aeroponics, aquaponics, vertical farming, and sustainable food systems that support food sovereignty and sustainability.
- **Multimedia Technology:** Youth and creatives gain experience in game design, AR/VR development, digital storytelling, and AI-assisted media production—tools that amplify AAPI voices and ensure cultural stories are represented in the digital future.
- **Wellness Technology:** Integrating traditional healing practices with modern innovations, the Center supports healing with telehealth systems, VR calming room designs, and culturally informed wearable devices, advancing non-invasive and holistic care models.

Together, these tracks demonstrate why IT matters: technology becomes a vehicle for economic mobility, cultural preservation, and community innovation.

## What You'll Discover Each Month

Every issue of MN Biz Vision highlights AAPI business owners across diverse sectors, celebrates immigrant and refugee success stories, and shares practical resources on financing, marketing, digital tools, and entrepreneurship. Workforce development features dive into emerging IT opportunities within AgTech, Multimedia, and Wellness Technology, supported by training programs and employer partnerships.

## Building Economic Opportunity & Cultural Resilience

Whether you are strengthening a family business, exploring a career transition, entering tech fields, or launching a new venture, MN Biz Vision: Asian Kaleidoscope connects you to the networks, knowledge, and inspiration needed to thrive. Join us each month as we celebrate AAPI excellence - honoring cultural traditions while embracing the technological innovations shaping Minnesota's future.





Lex Liang

**Preface:** Behind every costume is a story—not just of the character wearing it, but of the artist creating it. In this interview, Lex Liang reflects on the creative process behind reimagining *The Wizard of Oz* for a new generation at Children's Theatre Company in Minneapolis.

More than a conversation about theater and design, this piece explores identity, empathy, and the human connection behind creative work. From growing up Asian American to helping actors feel confident in vulnerable moments, Liang shares how personal experiences continue to shape both the art onstage and the people bringing it to life.

## DESIGNING BEYOND THE COSTUME: AN INTERVIEW WITH DESIGNER LEX LIANG

For costume designer Lex Liang, design is about far more than fabric, sketches, or aesthetics. At its core, the work is about people—their vulnerabilities, identities, and the stories they carry onto the stage.

Based in New York City and originally from California, Liang is currently bringing a fresh visual interpretation to [The Wizard of Oz](#) at Children's Theatre Company in Minneapolis. While the production pays homage to the beloved 1939 film and the cultural legacy surrounding it, Liang says audiences can also expect surprises.

“The Wizard of Oz is obviously a classic,” Liang explains. “There are expectations people have of the costumes, and we wanted to honor the original designs while still creating something new.”

The production blends familiar visual references with original interpretations, offering what Liang describes as “Easter eggs” for longtime fans while carving out its own artistic identity. Balancing those expectations, however, is part of the challenge.

“You want it to feel original enough that there’s a reason you’re designing it,” Liang says. “This is a from-scratch design. We’re not just pulling costumes from another production. The challenge is meeting expectations while hopefully exceeding them.”

With more than 20 actors—most portraying multiple characters—the scale of the production is significant. Still, Liang describes the work as joyful, especially with the support of an experienced costume shop team helping bring the vision to life.



Toto and Harriet Spencer in Children's Theatre Company's 2026 production of *The Wizard of Oz*. Photo by Glen Stubbe Photography



(L-R) Dean Holt, Harriet Spencer, Reed Sigmund, and Regina Marie Williams in Children's Theatre Company's 2026 production of *The Wizard of Oz*. Photo by Glen Stubbe Photography

Beyond the spectacle of theater, Liang's work is deeply shaped by identity and lived experience. Born to a Taiwanese father and Japanese mother, Liang grew up navigating multiple cultural influences as an Asian American.

"The older I get, the more I realize I draw on what some might call an Asian aesthetic," Liang says. "Not necessarily in patterns or motifs, but in simplicity, clean lines, and modernity."

While those influences may appear subtly in the visual work, Liang says their greatest impact is often interpersonal rather than aesthetic.

Much of costume design, Liang explains, involves collaboration and emotional awareness. Designers work closely with actors during fittings—private moments where performers, despite appearing confident onstage, can feel deeply vulnerable.

"Often my job is to make someone feel as comfortable as they can in that vulnerable space," Liang says. "Actors have insecurities just like the rest of us."

Growing up feeling "othered" at times as the only Asian student in certain spaces helped shape Liang's sensitivity toward others. That awareness now informs how Liang approaches performers, collaborators, and creative spaces.

"I think growing up being different makes you acutely aware of judgment and comparison," Liang reflects. "That definitely influences how I work with people."

Liang also acknowledges how much representation has changed over the years. Growing up before social media and widespread digital access, there were fewer

opportunities to see Asian American voices amplified publicly. Today, Liang sees the internet and social platforms as powerful tools for visibility and connection.

“It gives people who may not otherwise feel seen or heard the chance to connect with others who share similar experiences,” Liang says. “I think that can be really beneficial for young people.”



Autumn Ness in Children’s Theatre Company’s 2026 production of *The Wizard of Oz*. Photo by Glen Stubbe Photography



(Top) Becca Claire Hart. (Bottom) Aniya Bostick, Dean Holt, Reed Sigmund, and Regina Marie Williams in Children’s Theatre Company’s 2026 production of *The Wizard of Oz*. Photo by Glen Stubbe Photography

At the same time, Liang emphasizes the importance of balancing cultural values with self-expression. Raised in a household that emphasized hard work, humility, and discipline, Liang admires younger generations for speaking up more openly and advocating for themselves.

“I would hope people understand that being different is not an inconvenience,” Liang says. “It can be a strength if you really harness it.”

When asked about success, Liang avoids simple definitions. Instead, success is framed through happiness, integrity, and kindness rather than status or money alone. “If you believe in what you do, stay true to your values, and are kind to those around you, you’re off to a pretty good start,” Liang says. “At the end of the day, we all just want to be happy.”

Liang is eager to share this reimagined production of *The Wizard of Oz* with audiences in the Twin Cities.

“I think people are in for a real treat,” Liang says. “It’s going to be a great time for folks from eight to 80.”

*The Wizard of Oz* is onstage now through June 14, at Children’s Theatre Company (2400 3rd Ave S, Minneapolis, MN 55404). Tickets are available at [childrenstheatre.org/oz](https://childrenstheatre.org/oz)



Cong Liu

**Series Preface:** Asian Media Access proudly presents “Calling America HOME” Series, which is inspired by the resilience and hope shared by immigrants and refugees from all corners of the world who have rebuilt their lives in Minnesota. Through these stories, we invite readers to witness a legacy of survival, determination, and hope against impossible odds.

For this issue, we invite Dr. Cong Liu to share his immigration story, intertwined with his music-making journey—how he embraces diverse cultures and art forms to build connections not only across cultures, but also between different ways of understanding the world.

## **Q1. Thank you for speaking with AMA. Can you begin by introducing yourself and describing your journey to Minnesota?**

I am Dr. Cong Liu, a composer, educator, and interdisciplinary artist exploring how sound, perception, and technology intersect to shape human experience. My work investigates how music can function not only as an artistic expression, but also as a medium for communication, cultural memory, and emotional understanding.

My artistic foundation was deeply shaped by Chinese music traditions. My mother is a guzheng performer, and I grew up immersed in that environment, where music was not something separate from life, but something that naturally existed within it. Through this early exposure, I came to understand sound not only as music, but as a cultural and emotional language.

At the same time, my father’s work in dance influenced how I perceive artistic expression.



Cong as a child with guzheng musical instrument



Cong as a child

Growing up in an environment where music and movement were closely connected allowed me to see that different art forms are not isolated, but can move across and transform into one another. This early interdisciplinary awareness later became central to my work.

Before coming to the United States, I had already been actively engaged in composition, teaching, and commissioned creative work in China. My compositions, including works for dance and stage productions, received recognition at both regional and professional levels, including awards from cultural institutions and music competitions. At the same time, I worked as a lecturer and instructor at universities, teaching courses such as music theory, composition, and computer music. Through this combination of creative practice and teaching, I developed an approach that moves between artistic expression and structured learning environments. These experiences shaped my understanding of music not only as an art form, but as a medium deeply connected to cultural context and social function.



Cong Receiving PHD Diploma

I came to Minnesota to pursue my doctoral studies in music composition at the University of Minnesota, where I later earned my Ph.D. My initial goal was to deepen my understanding of music as a structured system of expression. However, during my research, I became increasingly interested in how music can carry information—how it can translate ideas, emotions, and perception.

It was through this exploration that I encountered artificial intelligence. Rather than approaching it as a purely technological field, I experienced it as an extension of artistic inquiry—a tool that allows new ways of thinking about sound, perception, and meaning.

Since arriving in Minnesota, I have participated in educational and community-based initiatives that connect music, AI, and visual storytelling. I have also contributed to a range of creative and professional projects, including music for film, dance/theater productions, and invited educational roles, including guest lectures and evaluation panels for creative and technology-focused programs.

Through collaborations with Asia Media Access, I have been invited to contribute to initiatives that explore how technology can support creative expression while preserving cultural identity, particularly within immigrant and multicultural communities. Currently, my work continues to focus on interdisciplinary education and creative practice, supporting young people and communities in exploring how

culture, creativity, and technology can coexist and grow together.

## Q2. Please share more with us – How did your own cultural identity evolve while working in supporting other entrepreneurs? How has that work shaped your sense of belonging in both Chinese and American cultures?

My cultural identity has evolved through movement—both geographical and experiential. In China, I was shaped by traditions that value continuity, discipline, and deep engagement with artistic forms. Music required patience, repetition, and a long-term relationship with both technique and cultural context.



Cong hosting an event, Chinese New Year Festival

When I began working in the United States, I encountered a different creative environment—one that emphasized experimentation, interdisciplinary collaboration, and openness. At first, these differences felt like contrasts. Over time, however, I came to understand them as complementary forces.

This shift became more tangible through my involvement in larger-scale artistic and community-based projects. For example, I served as the festival director for the *Chinese New Year Festival* (2023), hosted by the University of Minnesota School of Music. The festival brought together large-scale performances and academic forums, creating a

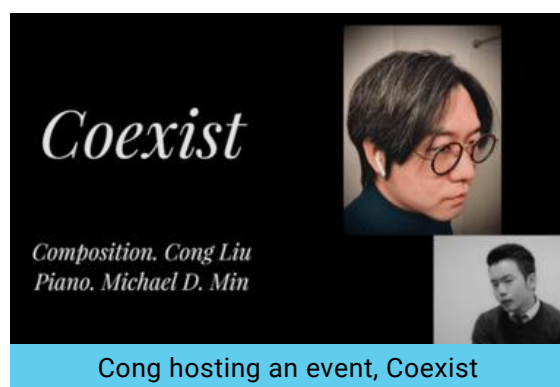
platform for cultural dialogue across communities. Through organizing and shaping this event, I experienced how cultural expression is not fixed—it evolves through interaction, interpretation, and context.

I am proud of my cross-cultural, and cross-disciplinary works, few in MN has expanded to the field. My work in performance and composition further deepened this understanding. In projects such as the musical *Shelter*, which has been presented in multiple locations across the United States, including at the Tedd Mann Concert Hall in Minneapolis—where I contributed as an Assistant Music Director and percussion composer—I engaged with audiences in shared cultural spaces where storytelling, music, and identity intersect.

Similarly, my work in live film scoring—particularly in performances associated with *Cinema Ritrovato On Tour – Minneapolis*—allowed me to create live musical accompaniment for Chinese silent films using traditional Chinese instruments, presented to American audiences. In these moments, I was not only composing music, but navigating cultural perception in real time, translating meaning across different contexts.

In addition, through interdisciplinary collaborations, teaching, and mentorship, I have worked closely with individuals from diverse backgrounds. In these environments, I observed how identity is not something fixed, but something negotiated through interaction, creativity, and lived experience.

Through these experiences, my sense of belonging has shifted. It is no longer tied to a single place or definition, but to the ability to move between perspectives. Chinese culture provides grounding and depth, while American culture offers space for expansion and reinterpretation. Together, they form a way of thinking that is both rooted and adaptive.



For many immigrants, this duality is not something to resolve, but something to embrace. It allows us to build connections—not only between cultures, but between different ways of understanding the world.

### Q3. How do you balance cultural authenticity while making your work accessible to others who may not be familiar with your cultural traditions?



Cong's creation, reflex

Balancing authenticity and accessibility begins with recognizing that human experience is rooted in perception.

In my work, I often start with sensory elements—sound, rhythm, and emotion—because these are shared across cultures. Before people understand a concept intellectually, they can experience it physically and emotionally.

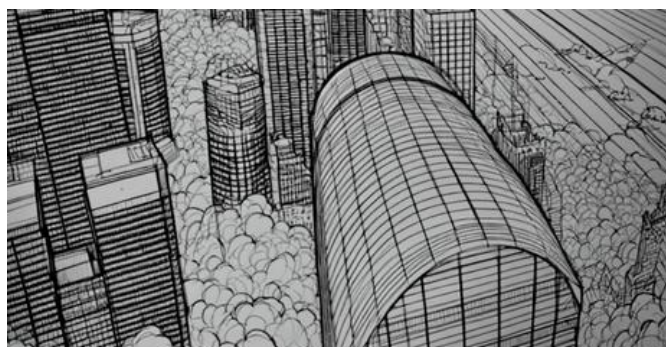
My personal experience has also influenced

this approach. As someone who is colorblind, I have always been aware that perception is not universal. This led me to explore how color can be translated into sound—how something visual can become something audible.

This process is not only technical; it is philosophical. It asks how we define reality, and how different forms of perception can coexist. In teaching and creative practice, I try to create spaces where people can experience first, and understand later. Accessibility, to me, is not about simplifying culture, but about opening a pathway into it.

## **Q4. You have accomplished so much – from arriving at the States to becoming a cultural bearer. What were some of the pivotal challenges you faced in building your life in America?**

One of the most persistent challenges I have faced is uncertainty—particularly within the structural conditions that shape immigrant life. This uncertainty affects not only stability, but also one’s ability to plan, to build, and to imagine the future.



Cong’s creation

Another challenge has been learning to navigate unfamiliar systems.

Educational environments, professional expectations, and social dynamics all require continuous adaptation. At the same time, working within diverse communities has made me more aware of broader challenges, such as unequal

access to resources, limited representation in the arts, and barriers faced by immigrant populations.

These experiences gradually shaped my understanding of responsibility. In this process, I began to see my work not only as a form of artistic practice, but also as a way of connecting people and cultures. My work itself reflects the intersection of Eastern and Western cultural perspectives. It carries the traces of my own evolving identity as I move across different environments, and becomes a tangible expression of how cultural understanding shifts and takes form. In this sense, my creative work serves as a living example of how cultures interact, transform, and become accessible through experience.

At the same time, I have been working in a period marked by the rapid development of artificial intelligence. To me, AI should not replace human identity, but amplify it. It

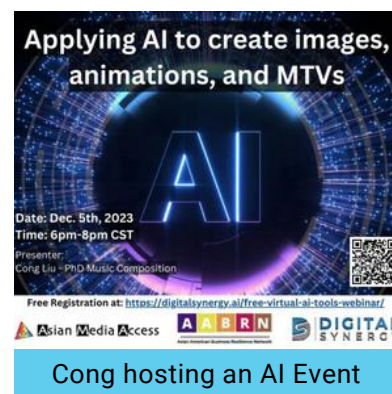
allows me to integrate past experiences, present contexts, and cross-cultural understanding into new forms of expression. Through this process, my work has gradually become a bridge between cultures. Whether through performance, education, or interdisciplinary collaboration, I aim to create spaces where unfamiliar cultural forms can be experienced and understood in accessible ways.

In a multicultural society like the United States, this kind of work contributes to dialogue, mutual understanding, and a more inclusive cultural environment. It is not only about artistic expression, but also about how people come to understand one another across differences.

**Q5. Love your statement “Art and technology should not replace human identity, but amplify it.” Reflecting on that journey, what impacts do you hope having on the next generation?**

AI, to me, is not a substitute for creativity, but a tool that expands my vision and transforms imagined ideas into tangible forms.

My relationship with AI did not begin with technology—it began with curiosity. I wanted to understand how music communicates, how perception works, and how ideas can be translated across forms. Over time, I came to see AI as an extension of that inquiry. It allows us to make visible—or audible—things that were previously difficult to express.



At present, I am involved in community-based educational initiatives, including participation in AI-focused 2D and 3D storytelling programs in St. Paul, as well as supporting music recording and production workshops with students at Minnesota Preparatory Academy. These efforts are not only about teaching skills—they are about creating spaces where young people can explore who they are, how they want to express themselves, and how their voices can connect with others.

In my teaching and workshops, I often encourage students to share their work with one another, to respond to each other’s ideas, and to see creativity as something that develops through interaction rather than in isolation. Through this process, they begin to recognize that their creative choices—what they express, how they present it, and how they engage with others—can shape how people feel, think, and connect.

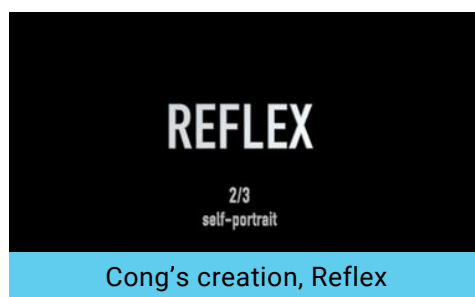
In this sense, creativity is not only about personal expression, but also about participation: contributing to shared experiences, telling stories that resonate beyond

oneself, and helping others feel seen and understood. At the same time, I hope they can understand that individual perspectives and collective thinking are not in conflict. Instead, they can coexist through dialogue—through brainstorming, exchange of ideas, and collaborative creation. It is within this process that individuals learn to think not only from their own perspective, but also from the perspective of a community, developing awareness of how their ideas and actions can contribute to something larger than themselves.

For the next generation, I hope they will not see technology as something separate from culture, but as something that can carry it forward. They should feel empowered to use new tools without losing their sense of identity. Ultimately, I hope they will learn to create with awareness—with an understanding that creativity is not only about innovation, but also about meaning, connection, and responsibility.

**Q6. Any final words for our readers?**

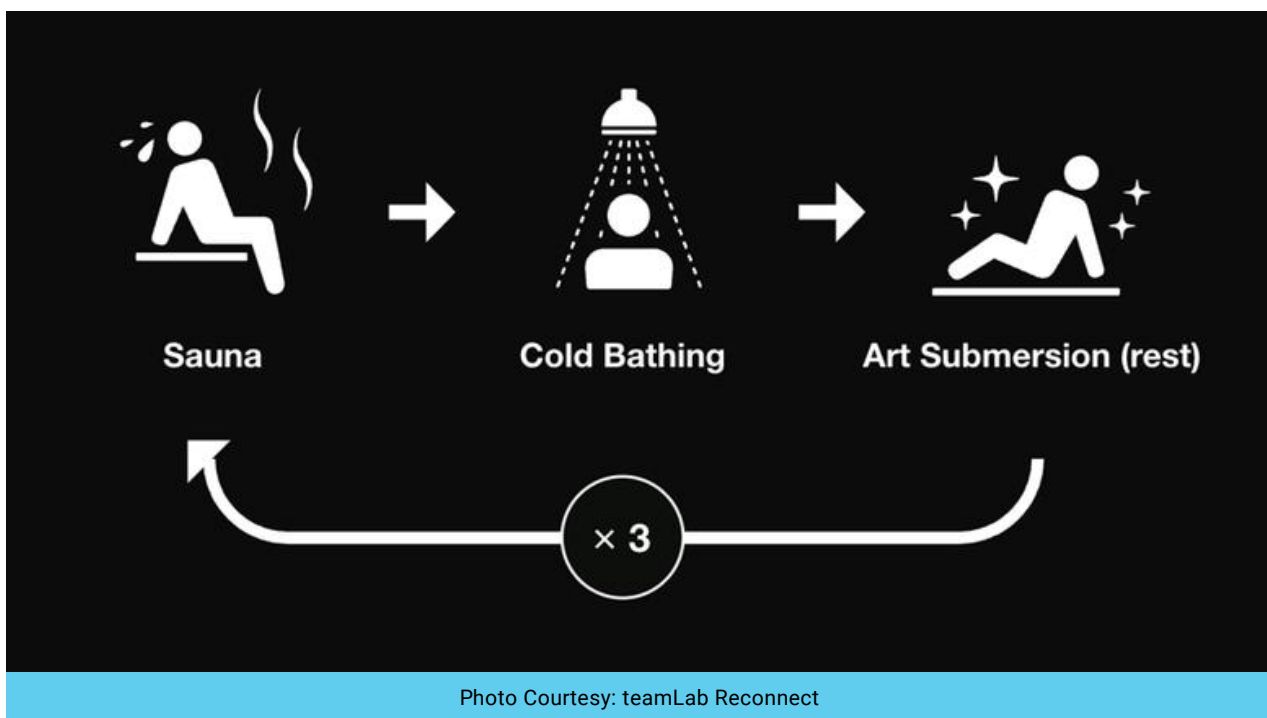
I often think about how tradition and innovation are not opposites, but part of the same process. Over time, I have come to feel that “this duality is not something to resolve, but something to embrace.”



In my own journey, moving between cultures has shown me that what feels unfamiliar at first can become a source of creativity and understanding—if we are willing to stay open to it. Much of what I do now grows out of this experience. Working with students, communities, and young creators in Minnesota—through advanced AI storytelling programs in St. Paul and music production workshops at Minnesota Preparatory Academy—I see how powerful it can be when people are given space to explore who they are and how they connect with others.

I believe this is where my contribution begins – it is not only about what I create, but about how we create spaces where people can listen, share, and understand perspectives beyond their own. I believe the United States has something very special –so many different cultures, ideas, and ways of seeing the world coming together in one place. When we approach that diversity with curiosity and respect, it becomes a strength, not a challenge.

And in that space, people who move between cultures and languages can help connect those worlds—not by replacing one with another, but by helping them speak to each other. So if there is one thing I would share, it is this: culture is not something fixed. It grows through interaction. And each of us has a role in that process—through how we listen, how we create, and how we connect.



## SAUNA MEETS ART

### *How teamLab Reconnect Inspires the Center for Wellness Technology's Immersive Health Vision*

In March - Nov 2021, teamLab opened an extraordinary exhibition in Roppongi, Tokyo that fundamentally reimagined the relationship between wellness practices, immersive art, and human consciousness. teamLab Reconnect introduced the world to a revolutionary concept: **experiencing art in one's finest mental state through the integration of traditional sauna practices with cutting-edge digital installations.** By guiding visitors through alternating hot and cold baths - sauna, cold water immersion, and rest periods spent immersed in breathtaking digital art - the exhibition demonstrated that wellness interventions and aesthetic experiences are not separate pursuits but mutually reinforcing pathways to human flourishing.

### **The Science of the Sauna Trance at teamLab**

The genius of teamLab Reconnect lies in its scientific understanding of the sauna trance - an exceptionally unique neurological state achieved through repeated exposure to heat, cold, and rest. When visitors enter this altered state, their senses sharpen, minds clear, and perception expands, allowing them to experience beauty and phenomena that normally go unnoticed. teamLab recognized that this heightened cognitive state creates the perfect conditions for encountering their Supernature Phenomena artworks - installations that defy universal laws like gravitation, causing perception to shift and generating cognitive experiences that differ entirely from everyday life. Rather than treating the sauna as merely relaxation or the art as passive

viewing, teamLab Reconnect creates a synergistic experience where physiological transformation enables deeper aesthetic engagement, and immersive art amplifies the restorative benefits of wellness practices. The result is visitors who "reconnect to the world and time," achieving a holistic experience that recognizes mind, body, and environment as inseparable dimensions of human being.



Photo Courtesy: teamLab Reconnect

## **Our Vision: Comprehensive Integration**

Inspired by teamLab Reconnect, our Center for Wellness Technology is designed with a comprehensive integration of traditional healing modalities, modern wellness technologies, and immersive digital experiences. Our facility design merges traditional healing practices - herbal medicine consultations, acupuncture, therapeutic massage - with modern health modalities including sauna, infrared light therapy, ice chambers, and salt rooms, all enhanced by immersive digital environments. Just as teamLab Reconnect recognized that the sauna trance creates optimal conditions for experiencing art, we understand that combining multiple wellness modalities in sequence creates synergistic physiological and neurological effects that amplify both healing outcomes and cultural connection. Visitors might begin with acupuncture to balance energy meridians, transition to our infrared sauna for deep tissue relaxation, experience cold immersion in the ice chamber to trigger beneficial stress responses, then enter our digital immersive forest calming room where their heightened sensory state allows them to experience nature-based healing with unprecedented depth and presence.

## **Digital Immersion Effort at Center for Wellness Technology**

Our signature installation, the 5D Immersion "Flower World," exemplifies how the Center advances teamLab's vision while centering cultural diversity and accessibility. This multisensory environment combines visual projections of Minnesota orchid botanicals, spatial audio featuring traditional music and natural soundscapes, tactile interaction with projected flowers, and environmental controls that shift temperature

and humidity across seasons. Visitors who arrive having moved through our wellness modalities enter this space in optimal neurological states - endorphin-elevated, cortisol-reduced - primed to absorb its restorative beauty and cultural meaning.



Photo Courtesy: teamLab Reconnect

Another digital immersive forest calming room serves as a critical component, offering a nature-based alternative to the 5D Flower World's vibrant sensory stimulation. Drawing on research demonstrating that forest bathing (shinrin-yoku) reduces cortisol, lowers blood pressure, and enhances immune function, this space uses 360-degree projection, binaural audio, and subtle environmental controls to transport visitors into Minnesota's diverse ecosystems—birch forests sacred to Ojibwe communities, prairie grasslands central to Dakota traditions. Visitors recovering from ice chamber exposure or completing their salt room respiratory



therapy can rest in the forest calming room, their physiological stress responses calming as they reconnect with natural environments that many urban Minnesotans - particularly those in disinvested neighborhoods like

Frogtown and Rondo - rarely access. By pairing modern wellness technologies with culturally-significant nature immersion, we prove that healing happens at the intersection of tradition, innovation, and environmental connection.

## New Wellness Offerings as a Destination

The teamLab Reconnect model also validates our conviction that wellness infrastructure must be designed as destination-worthy cultural experiences, not clinical interventions grafted onto entertainment spaces. When the Center for Wellness Technology transforms the St. Paul 19 Exchange Street East into a wellness hub featuring immersive wellness installations at, we envision spaces where visitors—like those at teamLab Reconnect—enter heightened states of awareness through culturally-grounded wellness practices enhanced by immersive technology.

Economically, our model follows teamLab Reconnect's demonstration that wellness-art convergence attracts diverse audiences and generates sustainable revenue while remaining mission-focused. The 5D Flower World and digital forest calming room become destination attractions drawing cultural tourists, school groups seeking innovative health education, and corporations booking team wellness experiences - cross-subsidizing affordable community access. Our location at the St. Paul 19 Exchange Street East downtown installations ensure accessibility via public transit, walking, and biking, eliminating transportation barriers while generating foot traffic for surrounding businesses.



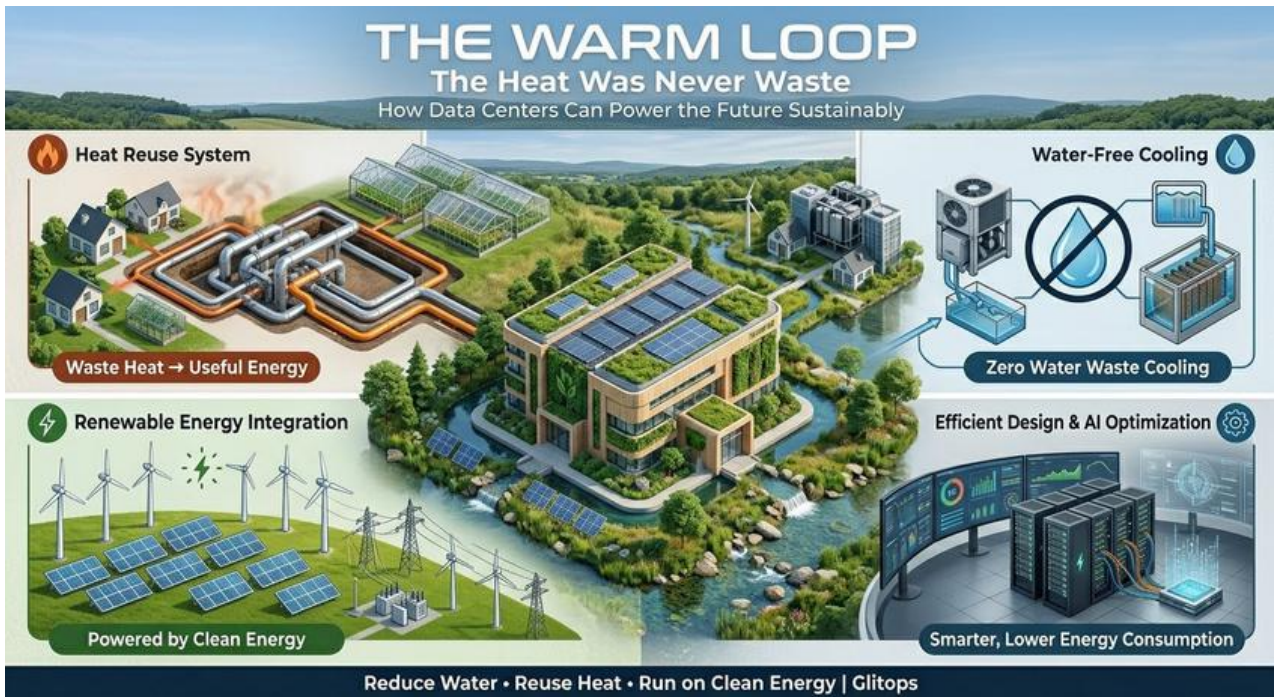
Photo Courtesy: teamLab Reconnect

## Technology as Cultural Revitalization

Beginning summer 2026, the Center will train disadvantaged neighbors to develop immersive wellness experiences that honor Minnesota's diverse healing traditions — Chinese mythology store-telling, Hmong herbal medicine, African American movement practices, Indigenous spirit healing — using contemporary AR/VR tools. The goal mirrors teamLab Reconnect's achievement: technology not replacing

cultural authenticity, but amplifying it, making ancestral wellness practices accessible to new generations in formats that resonate with contemporary life. Most powerfully, when residents experience acupuncture honoring ancestral medicine, sauna and ice therapy optimizing their physiology, and the 5D Flower World celebrating their heritage through cutting-edge technology, they reconnect to identities and healing knowledge that colonialism, displacement, and medical racism sought to erase. This is wellness as cultural revitalization, technology as justice, and immersive art as a pathway to collective healing.





# THE WARM LOOP: THE HEAT WAS NEVER WASTE

Columnist - Vivek Ekarat

*How the data-center industry and the AI boom powering it can stop burning the planet's water and start warming your home instead.*

In a suburb of Helsinki, a resident turns on a kitchen radiator and doesn't notice anything unusual. The warmth came, in part, from a GPU training an AI model a few kilometers away. That loop from server to radiator already exists at scale. Almost none of its logic has reached the United States.

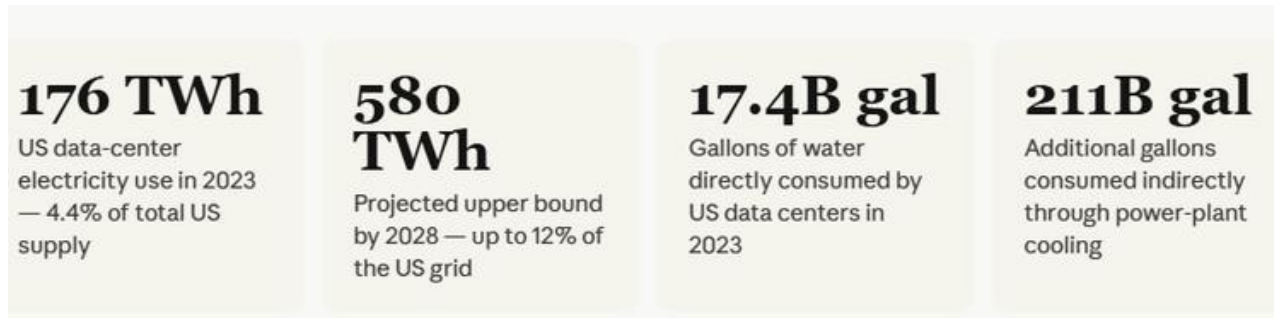
## Part 1 The Scale: A Grid-Scale Problem Hidden in Plain Sight

The data-center industry is no longer a niche corner of the energy system. It is now a primary driver of electricity demand growth and its resource footprint is propagating directly into household bills.

That indirect figure 211 billion gallons, nearly 13 times the direct number is the single most overlooked statistic in the entire debate. Every



time a data center draws power from a coal or gas plant, that plant evaporates river and lake water to cool itself. The data center's water footprint doesn't end at the fence line.



The economic signal is already reaching households. In the PJM electricity market, which covers 65 million Americans from Illinois to North Carolina, data-center demand contributed to a \$9.3 billion capacity-market price increase for 2025–26. Residential rates in parts of the region rose up to 20 percent in the summer of 2025.

*“An industry at 4.4 percent of the US grid and climbing toward 12 percent will be regulated. The only question is whether the rules arrive by design or by crisis.”*

## **Part 2 The Reframe: Heat Is a Product. Water Is Optional.**

Every joule of electricity that enters a data center eventually leaves as heat. That is not a design flaw it is thermodynamics. For most of computing history, engineers treated that heat as waste to be disposed of, and the cheapest disposal method was evaporating water in a cooling tower.

Both choices were rational when computing was a tiny fraction of the grid and water was abundant where facilities were sited. Neither is rational now.

*The core reframe Once heat is treated as a product rather than waste, every design decision flips. You stop trying to dilute it into the atmosphere and start concentrating it, keeping it at a useful temperature, and moving it intact to somewhere that needs it. Raising server outlet temperature from 35°C to 60°C is an inconvenience if you're throwing the heat away and a triumph if you're selling it to a district heating network.*

Once water is treated as optional not a free solvent the entire evaporative-cooling paradigm becomes a legacy choice. Sealed-loop coolants piped directly onto chips can be filled once at construction and circulate indefinitely. Two-phase dielectric fluids boil at the chip surface and condense on a coil in the tank lid. No fans, no water at all.

## **Part 3 Proof Points : The Warm Loop Is Already Running**

These are not pilot projects or concept renders. They are in operation today.

<p>ESPOO, FINLAND</p> <p><b>Microsoft × Fortum</b></p> <p>350 MW of server heat feeds a municipal network warming 250,000 people — roughly 40% of Fortum's regional heat demand.</p>	<p>ODENSE, DENMARK</p> <p><b>Meta's hyperscale campus</b></p> <p>~10 GWh of annual thermal recovery via heat pump, enough to warm 6,900 homes.</p>	<p>STOCKHOLM, SWEDEN</p> <p><b>Stockholm Data Parks</b></p> <p>Economics inverted entirely: operators are paid for their heat output rather than charged to dispose of it.</p>
<p>QUÉBEC, CANADA</p> <p><b>QScale greenhouses</b></p> <p>Server heat piped into commercial greenhouses growing tomatoes year-round — replacing produce trucked thousands of miles.</p>	<p>PARIS, FRANCE</p> <p><b>Olympic pool heating</b></p> <p>A Paris data center heats the municipal swimming pool built for the 2024 Olympics.</p>	<p>WISCONSIN &amp; ARIZONA, US</p> <p><b>Microsoft zero-water sites</b></p> <p>Next-generation facilities announced in Dec 2025 with zero ongoing water use for cooling. Fleet-wide WUE fell 39% in four years.</p>

What these examples share is not a technology it's an assumption: that a data center is a node in a local energy economy rather than an isolated consumer. The list of viable heat recipients is now long enough that almost any siting decision can be paired with a destination, if the decision is made early.

## Part 4 Why Markets Won't Fix This Alone : The Market's Honest Limit

Every technology described above is real, commercially available, and demonstrably effective. Every one is also more expensive upfront than what it replaces. Closed-loop cooling costs more than an evaporative tower. Waste-heat recovery requires pipes and a contractual buyer. Left to market forces alone, the cheapest option wins and in 2026, the cheapest option is still evaporation plus grid electricity.

This is not a new problem. It is precisely the problem the power sector faced with coal plants in the 1960s. Smokestack scrubbers existed. Electrostatic precipitators existed. Low-sulfur fuel switching existed. None was widely adopted until the Clean Air Act of 1970 made them mandatory. The technology was ready; the incentive was not. Once the rules changed, adoption was rapid and compliance itself became an economic opportunity.

The data-center industry is at the same inflection point. The tools are ready. The policy is not.

## Part 5 The Policy Landscape What Europe Mandates and America Doesn't

Europe has quietly built the world's first regulatory framework for digital infrastructure sustainability. Four elements define what is emerging and what the United States entirely lacks at the federal level.

<p><b>EU-WIDE</b></p> <p><b>Mandatory public disclosure</b></p> <p>EU Energy Efficiency Directive (Oct 2025): facilities above 500 kW must report energy, water, PUE, WUE, renewable share, and waste-heat data to a public database.</p>	<p><b>GERMANY</b></p> <p><b>Waste-heat quotas with a schedule</b></p> <p>From July 2026: 10% waste-heat reuse required, rising to 15% in 2027 and 20% by 2028. PUE capped at 1.2 for new builds.</p>	<p><b>EU DIRECTION</b></p> <p><b>Additionality in clean energy</b></p> <p>Moving to require that "renewable" purchases represent new generation, hourly-matched, in the same grid region — closing the paper-certificates loophole.</p>	<p><b>NETHERLANDS / IRELAND</b></p> <p><b>Siting discipline and consent</b></p> <p>Netherlands paused hyperscale permits after public backlash in 2022. Ireland effectively froze new Dublin-area grid connections through 2028.</p>
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The United States has none of this at the federal level no mandatory reporting, no waste-heat requirement, no additionality rule. In Virginia, a recent review found that 80 percent of municipalities hosting data centers had non-disclosure agreements with developers shielding basic resource information from residents. That is the opposite of the European direction, and it is politically unsustainable.

## Part 6 The Three Asks : Who Needs to Do What

The warm loop closes in three places, each requiring a different actor.

### For operators & AI business leaders

- Require facility-level WUE and PUE disclosure quarterly from your data-center providers.
- Prefer chip-level liquid cooling and closed-loop designs for new AI workloads, especially in water-stressed regions.
- Move procurement toward hourly-matched, additionality-certified clean energy and treat it as a water strategy, not just a carbon one.
- Engage with the EU regulatory process now. It will shape your North American operating environment within a decade.

### For policymakers

- Mandate facility-level water and energy reporting modeled on the EU Directive.
- Phase in waste-heat utilization requirements modeled on Germany's Energy Efficiency Act.
- Write siting tests tied to watershed and grid-capacity thresholds with automatic moratorium triggers before the next crisis forces reactive rationing.

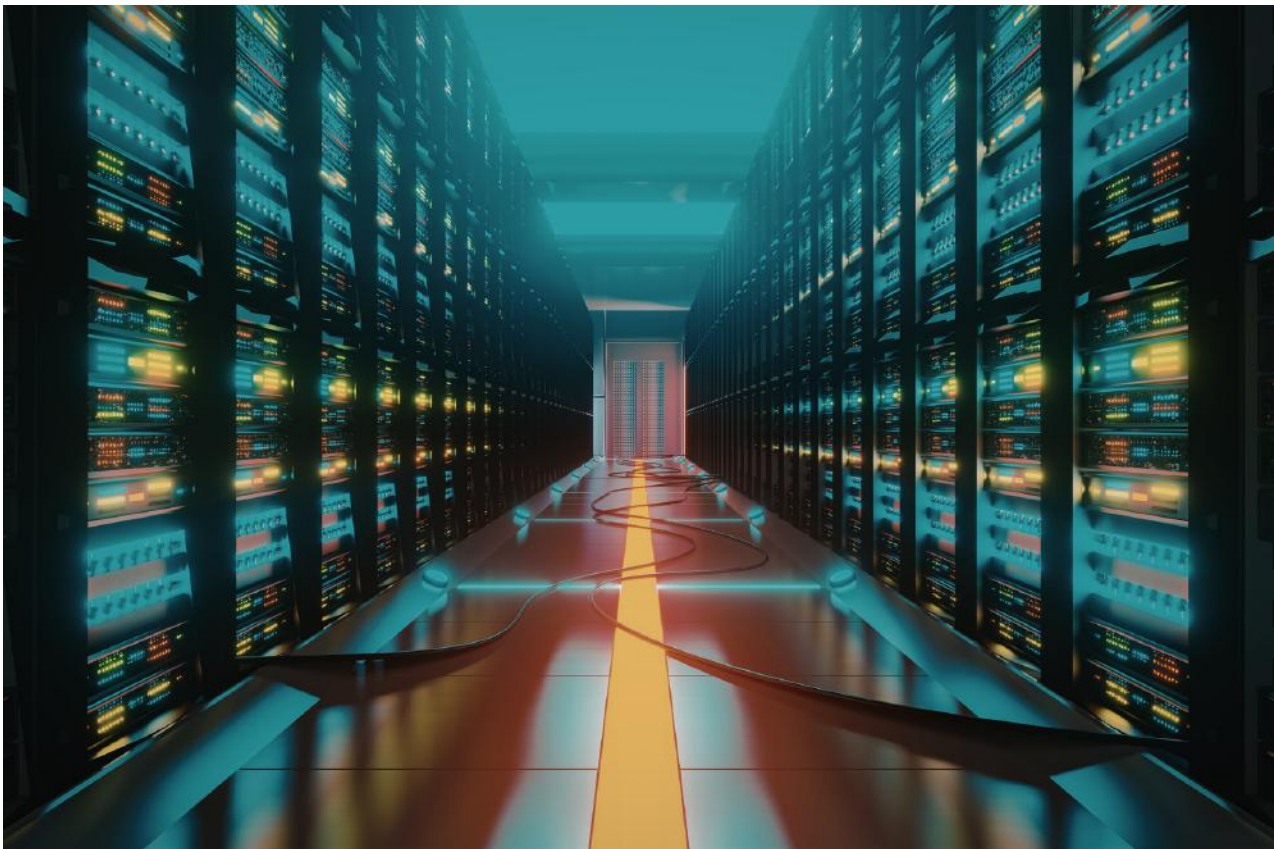
- Set sunset dates for open-loop evaporative cooling on the same model used for incandescent bulbs and combustion engines.

## **For host communities**

- Demand public disclosure before permits are issued end NDA-based siting that turns residents into silent partners.
- Negotiate community benefit agreements tied to resource use: subsidized heat, broadband, job training.
- Invest in district-heating infrastructure. The Nordic model wasn't accidental it was built by cities that decided, decades ago, that centralized heat was public infrastructure worth owning.

***“The heat was never waste. The water was never free. We just hadn't built the pipe yet and we hadn't written the rules that require the pipe to be there.”***

The data-center sector sits at roughly 4.4 percent of US electricity and is on track to double or triple by 2028. An industry of that scale will be regulated. The European answer is now visible. The American answer is not yet written but the engineering, the examples, and the economic logic are all in place. What remains is the decision to act before the backlash forces the issue.



April 10~11

## INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL OF MINNESOTA

The International Festival of Minnesota at RiverCentre in St. Paul brought people together to celebrate cultures from around the world. The event created a fun and welcoming space for cultural pride and community connection, featuring colorful displays, traditional clothing, and delicious foods that highlighted the unique traditions and flavors of different communities. Photo Courtesies: The International Festival of Minnesota and India Association of Minnesota



April 22

## ACEL-MSP 1 YEAR ANNIVERSARY

ACEL Minneapolis/St. Paul celebrated an important milestone with its 1st anniversary event, joined by St. Paul Mayor Kaohly Her. The celebration brought community members together to reflect on accomplishments, strengthen connections, and look ahead to continued community impact and collaboration. Photo Courtesy: ACEL Minneapolis/St. Paul



May 02

## LAO NEW YEAR 2026

Celebrating the 13th Annual Lao Culture Dance New Year Celebration hosted by Lao Culture Dance Fashion MN at Unison Banquet Hall. A beautiful evening filled with traditional dance, cultural performances, and community as people came together to celebrate Lao New Year and honor the richness of Lao heritage. Photo Courtesy: Lao Culture Dance Fashion MN



May 03

## TAMIL NEW YEAR

Celebrating Tamil New Year at the Hindu Temple of Minnesota, hosted by the Hindu Society of Minnesota. The event brought the community together through cultural traditions, prayers, and shared meals to welcome the new year with joy, reflection, and connection. Photo Courtesies: Hindu Society of Minnesota



May 16

## LIGHT OF CHINESE CULTURE PERFORMANCE SERIES: CHINESE MELODIE

Celebrating the beauty of Chinese culture through music, dance, and traditional performances at the Light of Chinese Culture Performance Series: Chinese Melodies in Edina. The event brought the community together to experience the richness of Chinese arts and cultural traditions.



May 19

## GLORIOUS TAIWAN

Celebrating the beauty of Taiwanese culture through music, dance, and storytelling at “Glorious Taiwan”. The event brought together talented performers and community members to showcase traditional and contemporary Taiwanese arts while celebrating cultural connection and heritage.





*Startup* COMPETITION. SEED *Funding*. MENTORSHIP

## 2026 MN CUP: CALLING ALL ENTREPRENEURS!

The Secretary of State's office wanted to let you know about a great opportunity for Minnesota entrepreneurs, researchers, inventors, and small business owners. It's called MN Cup, it's organized by the University of Minnesota, and it's available to any Minnesota-based company with less than \$1 million in annual revenue.

[MN Cup](#) has become a great first step for launching a new business, offering free education, mentorship, promotional opportunities, and seed funding for those that advance. The competition is free to enter, and participants have until Friday, April 3, 2026, to submit their application.

[Click here to start your application](#)

[Click here to learn more about MN Cup and their resources](#)

### Upcoming Events



Monday, March 2nd



Monday, May 18th



Wednesday, June 3rd

2026 MN Cup Applications Open Now

Apply By April 3rd →

**\$10K grants are now open!**

# It's easier than ever to apply for **\$10K grants**

Digital Ready grants are back. **Apply for \$10,000 grants, part of over \$1M in total funding this year.** You only have to apply once to be considered all year for a \$10K grant, giving you more time to submit an application and take advantage of our courses and events.

## **VERIZON SMALL BUSINESS DIGITAL READY \$10,000 NATIONAL GRANT**

Digital Ready grants are back. Apply for \$10,000 grants, part of over \$1M in total funding this year. You only have to apply once to be considered all year for a \$10K grant, giving you more time to submit an application and take advantage of our courses and events.

### **Who can apply?**

Owners of for-profit small businesses based in the United States, Puerto Rico, or the U.S. Virgin Islands who are 18 or older may apply. Owners of multiple businesses may apply for one business only. See national grant FAQs for more information.

### **How do I apply?**

Register and complete any combination of two eligible courses or events anytime in 2026 to unlock the grant application. Apply once to remain eligible for \$10,000 grants awarded throughout the year.

### **When will I hear back?**

Applications will be reviewed monthly from June through December 2026. Each month, 10 small businesses will be selected for grants. If you are not selected in a given month, your application will remain under consideration for the remainder of 2026. All applicants will receive a final decision by January 12, 2027.

[Apply Today >>](#)



# We can help you find your focus

Building a budget that actually works. Growing your network organically. Mastering work/life balance. All this and more with Digital Ready. What will your focus be?

Check it out



## BUDGETING TIPS AND NETWORKING KNOW-HOW

Struggling with budgeting, networking, or work-life balance? Digital Ready can help you find your focus and achieve your goals. Discover expert insights and practical tools to streamline your success at:

[https://link.digitalready.verizonwireless.com/OTk2LUtXQy0zNzcAAAGZKn5A0-kz96GrTzwrOAAOnZ\\_2TNNWrU\\_BQXIGWbjvQHw\\_pjs1hSTgctExNiFQleIF4R3PHE=](https://link.digitalready.verizonwireless.com/OTk2LUtXQy0zNzcAAAGZKn5A0-kz96GrTzwrOAAOnZ_2TNNWrU_BQXIGWbjvQHw_pjs1hSTgctExNiFQleIF4R3PHE=)

Find the event that fits your goals:

<https://digitalready.verizonwireless.com/category/events>



Event · Hands-on Help

Pricing for profit

Jun 2, 2 PM CT



Event · Ask the Expert

Creating automations for ecommerce

Jun 4, 10 AM CT



Event · Ask the Expert

Build a community, not just an email list

Jun 18, 2 PM CT

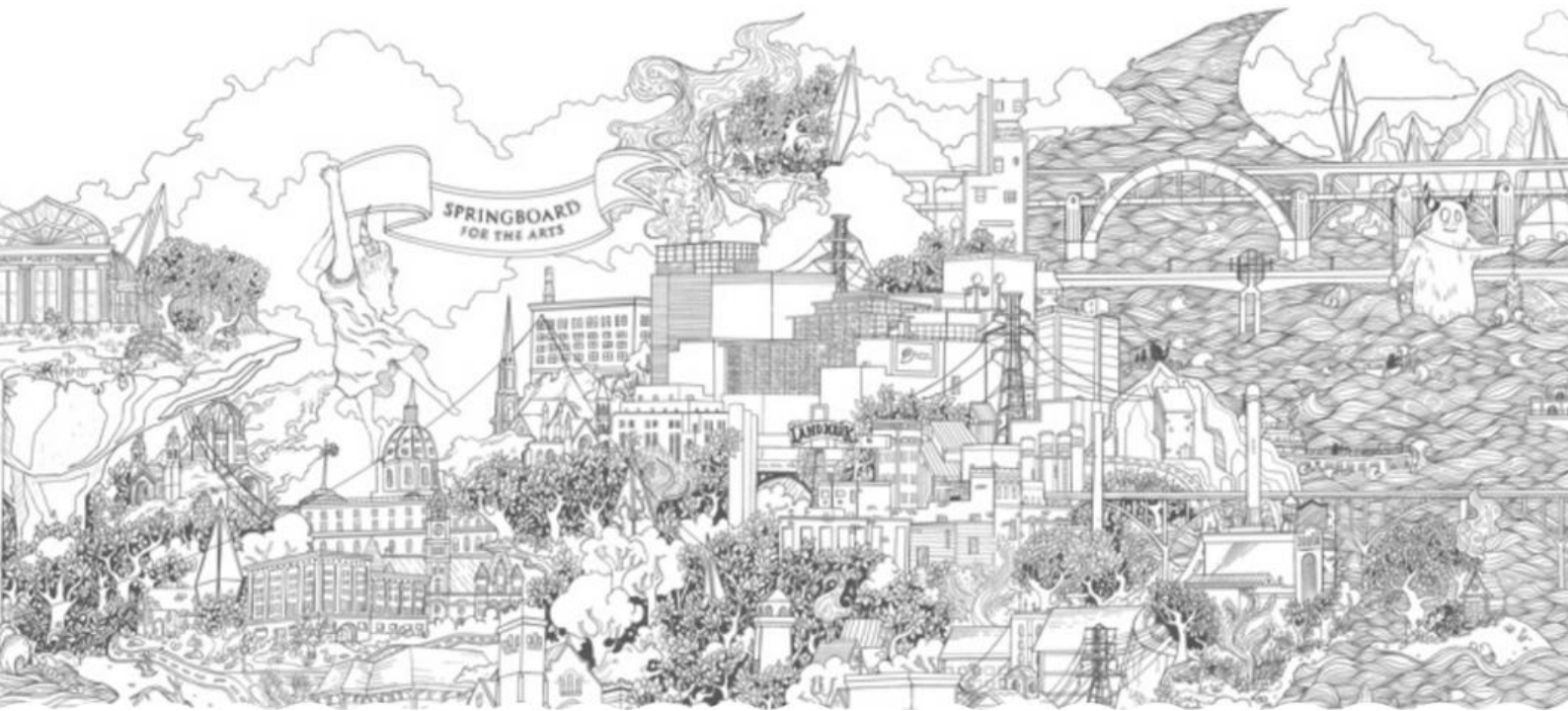


Event · Ask the Expert

Customer service excellence as a competitive advantage

Jun 22, 2 PM CT





## Springboard for the Arts Calendar of Events - Professional Development

- May 28, 2026 6:00 PM – 8:00 PM - Niche Markets for Writers: Kidlit, Comics, Nonfiction and More
- June 11, 2026 6:00 PM – 8:00 PM - Virtual Legal Clinic for Creatives
- June 25, 2026 6:00 PM – 8:00 PM - The Pitch That Fits: How to Pitch Your Non-Fiction Work to Agents and Editors

Learn more and register at: <https://springboardforthearts.org/events/>

## Additional Resources

- Get connected to Artist Career Consultants here: <https://springboardforthearts.org/professional-growth/career-consultations/artist-career-consultants/>
- Work of Art Toolkit: <https://springboardforthearts.org/woa>
- Handbook for Artists Working in Community: <https://springboardforthearts.org/artists-working-in-community/>

## Tax Tips from the IRS



- [Here's what taxpayers need to know about business related travel deductions](#)
- [Companies who promise to eliminate tax debt sometimes leave taxpayers high and dry](#)
- [Get an Identity Protection PIN.](#)
- [Tax Resources for Members of the Military](#)



MAY  
**27**  
11am~3pm

## SPRING 2026 IPO BOOTCAMP

Business Webinar

[LEARN MORE >>](#)

MAY  
**28**  
11am~1230pm

## SBA 101 - Funding - Credit Ready

Business Webinar

[LEARN MORE >>](#)

MAY  
**28**  
12pm~1pm

## 10 AI AUTOMATIONS YOU CAN DEPLOY IN 30 DAYS

Business Webinar

[LEARN MORE >>](#)

Jun  
**3**  
2pm~3pm

## AI WITHIN REACH: PRACTICAL TOOLS AND FRAMEWORKS FOR EVERYDAY SUCCESS

Business Webinar

[LEARN MORE >>](#)



Jun

5

10am~3pm

## 2026 Supplier Matchmaking Expo

Business Webinar

[LEARN MORE >>](#)

Jun

5

1pm~2pm

## MILESTONE CIRCLES: INFORMATION SESSION

Business Webinar

[LEARN MORE >>](#)

Jun

9

830am~1pm

## Are You Lender Ready?

Business Webinar

[LEARN MORE >>](#)

Jun

11

1pm~2pm

## CAPITAL COMPASS: PREPARING FOR CAPITAL THOUGH READINESS

Business Webinar

[LEARN MORE >>](#)

# Contact Us

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## Partnering with

