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Illinois in pilot to aid small manufacturers

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By Katherine Skiba | Federal officials on Wednesday announced a \$4.5 million pilot program to help small and medium manufacturers in Illinois and three other Great Lake states use supercomputing technology to speed product design.

The public-private partnership will assist firms in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan and Ohio, officials said.

Commerce Secretary Gary Locke told reporters Wednesday that using high-performance computing technology would “revolutionize” manufacturing processes. For small- and medium firms, the typical duration of the development cycle for new products will be reduced to eight months from 14, he said.

The money was awarded to the Council on Competitiveness, a Washington-based group of business, labor and university officials. It will be used to create the National Digital Engineering and Manufacturing Consortium. The consortium will use the money to develop software, purchase time on supercomputers and train manufacturers, officials said.

Deborah Wince-Smith, president and chief executive of the Council on Competitiveness, said the four states were chosen for the pilot because they represent “the heartland of America’s manufacturing process,” where products such as advanced batteries and next-generation vehicles are being built.

Council Senior Vice President Cynthia McIntyre said the money will be used to “develop a cadre of trainers and educators to go out in the field to the enterprises to educate them on the use of various software packages ... for their competitive advantage.” She invited companies seeking more information to contact her at 202-969-3406.

The large manufacturers involved include the Illinois-based equipment maker Deere & Co., officials said. Other state participants are the National Center for Supercomputing Applications at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and Argonne National Laboratory.

Funding for the pilot includes \$2 million from Commerce Department’s Economic Development Administration. The rest comes from private-sector partners including General Electric Co., Lockheed Martin and Procter & Gamble, along with Purdue University and State of Ohio.

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