

# Small Business Summit brings West Valley leaders, students together to build a shared economic future

**ASU's Center for Small and Medium-sized Businesses highlights impact and expands regional partnerships**

By Melissa Stroud, ASU News  
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More than 100 small-business founders, city leaders, faculty and students gathered at Arizona State University's West Valley campus last week for a powerful reminder: Thriving local economies are built through connection.

Hosted by the W. P. Carey School of Business' [Center for Small and Medium-sized Businesses](#), the Small Business Summit celebrated the growing impact of the [SMB Lab](#) while charting a bold vision for deeper collaboration between academia and Arizona's entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Throughout the morning, speakers returned to one idea — that small businesses do not succeed in isolation. They grow when cities, universities, students and industry experts work together.

## **A business school for the Valley**

[Todd Sandrin](#), vice provost and dean for ASU's West Valley campus, opened the morning and introduced W. P. Carey School Dean [Ohad Kadan](#), underscoring the campus's growing role in serving the region's workforce and business community. Kadan used the moment to reaffirm the W. P. Carey School's responsibility to the region, particularly the West Valley.

"We are not just the business school for ASU," Kadan said. "We are the business school for the Valley of the Sun, and particularly for the West Valley. We are here for you. We are here to collaborate and partner."

Kadan emphasized the school's dual commitment to access and excellence, noting that W. P. Carey School is among the largest and highest-ranked business schools in the country. That scale, he said, allows ASU to both deliver top-tier programs and broaden opportunity.

He also highlighted the intentional creation of the [School of Technology, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship](#) on the West Valley campus, a move designed to align with the region's rapid technological growth while strengthening support for small and medium-sized businesses.

"Every big business was once a small business," Kadan said. "Small businesses are the engine of economic growth. They reinvest here. They create jobs here. They keep prosperity in our communities."

## The ecosystem behind the impact

The summit was emceed by [Gopalakrishnan Mohan](#), director of the School of Technology, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship and senior associate dean of faculty at W. P. Carey, who framed the day as both a celebration and a listening session — an opportunity to explore what ASU is doing well and how it can deepen its impact on students and small businesses.

[Hitendra Chaturvedi](#), professor of practice and architect of the SMB Lab, shared the initiative's origin story, which launched in 2022 with a bold question: What if ASU could meaningfully impact small businesses at scale?

Chaturvedi pointed to a global imbalance in attention.

"There are about 5 million large businesses globally," he said. "But there are 850 million small and medium businesses employing roughly 2.5 billion people. Everybody looks at the tip of the iceberg. We focus on what's underneath."

In three years, the SMB Lab has hosted 17 labs supporting 41 companies. More than 419 students have participated, alongside nearly 100 faculty and staff contributors and 83 industry experts. Participating companies now represent an estimated \$15 million in combined valuation.

But Chaturvedi was quick to credit the broader community.

"The ecosystem came together," he said. "Students, faculty, industry associations, cities — all of you decided to help small businesses. That's why this works."

The summit marked the next step in that evolution — expanding beyond individual labs to reach a broader segment of the West Valley's entrepreneurial community.

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### SMB Lab

The [W. P. Carey School of Technology, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship's Small and Medium-sized Businesses, or SMB, Lab](#) was established in 2022 and has become a valuable resource for helping small businesses thrive by offering tailored, actionable solutions.

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## Regional leadership at the table

A panel of West Valley mayors — representing Avondale, El Mirage, Glendale and Goodyear — discussed economic development strategies and how cities are working to support entrepreneurs navigating growth across the region.

Avondale Mayor Mike Pineda said that while resources for small businesses exist, access and awareness are often the biggest barriers.

“Resources do exist, but often the small-business owners don’t quite know where to find them,” Pineda said. “Our role is to make it easier for business owners to launch, to grow and, more importantly, sustain themselves.”

The mayors highlighted innovation hubs, downtown revitalization efforts, workforce development partnerships and streamlined permitting processes as examples of how cities are working to remove friction and create opportunity for entrepreneurs.

Goodyear Mayor Joe Pizzillo emphasized the collaborative spirit that defines the area.

“West Valley leaders work very, very well together,” Pizzillo said. “We have a great partnership.”

Together, the panel underscored a shared commitment across city lines: strengthening the small-business ecosystem that fuels the West Valley’s growth.

## **A full-circle partnership**

Few stories illustrate the ecosystem better than Amapola Judd-Shimp.

As a former West Valley Chamber executive representing six cities, Judd-Shimp helped connect struggling small businesses with the SMB Lab.

“It started with connecting the dots,” she said. “A business would have a need, and I’d ask, ‘Is this something ASU students can help with?’ The answer was always yes.”

She recalled one small coffee company owner who was struggling to compete in a crowded market. “She told me she was losing money,” Judd-Shimp said. “After going through the SMB Lab, she’s now expanding to two new locations. That’s the impact.”

Now, as CEO of Cosic Education, Judd-Shimp has experienced the program from the other side — as a participating business. For Judd-Shimp, the summit reinforced the importance of awareness — particularly in the West Valley.

“ASU is here to help,” she said. “People don’t always realize the resources are available — especially in the West Valley. But this ecosystem works. It benefits the businesses, the students and the cities.”

## **Fellowship for founders**

Justin Moore, founder of Agoge, an organic hemp protein company he launched in Arizona in 2023, described entrepreneurship as “a lonely road.”

After relocating to Arizona, Moore began attending ASU events and connecting with university leaders. Through those relationships, he secured interns, accessed grant opportunities and participated in the SMB Lab.

“It’s night and day,” Moore said. “Being involved, showing up, staying engaged — the resources and support are out of this world.”

For Moore, the summit was less about pitching and more about fellowship. “It’s good to be around other people walking the same path,” he said. “We’re not here to sell anything. We’re here to share stories from the field and support each other.”

## Looking ahead

In addition to keynote remarks and the mayoral panel, the summit featured hands-on workshops on the adoption of artificial intelligence, small-business administration financing and business transitions, along with a career mixer connecting students directly with founders.

At a time when the West Valley is experiencing rapid growth and transformation, the message resonated clearly: Connection is not incidental; it is intentional.

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*To learn more about the SMB Lab and attend the next session, contact Hitendra Chaturvedi, professor of practice in W. P. Carey's NASPO Department of Supply Chain Management, at [hitendra.chaturvedi@asu.edu](mailto:hitendra.chaturvedi@asu.edu).*

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*This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).*

## Main image



Gopalakrishnan Mohan (far right), director of the School of Technology, Innovation and Entrepreneurship and senior associate dean of faculty in the W. P. Carey School of Business, introduces a panel of West Valley mayors representing Avondale, El Mirage, Glendale and Goodyear during the Small Business Summit hosted by the W. P. Carey School of Business' Center for Small and Medium-sized Businesses. Photo courtesy of ASU's New College of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences

**Text image(s)**



W. P. Carey School of Business Dean Ohad Kadan speaks to small-business owners, city officials, faculty and students at the Small Business Summit held at the ASU West Valley campus. Photo courtesy of ASU's New College of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences



Amapola Judd-Shimp, CEO of Cotic Education and former West Valley Chamber executive. Photo courtesy of ASU's New College of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences



Students participated in the summit, meeting small-business owners and ASU leadership. Photo by Mariana Lozovanu/ASU