

PROJECT STRATEGY

Defense Innovation Unit

OnRamp Hub

Charlotte & the Southeast USA

Anchoring the Southeast Defense Innovation Center (SEDIC)

Executive Summary

The Defense Innovation Unit (DIU) is expanding its national network of OnRamp Hubs — physical 'front doors' connecting non-traditional commercial companies to the Department of War marketplace. North Carolina has been specifically authorized by Congress to receive one of these hubs, with \$5 million designated in the FY2026 NDAA championed by Senator Ted Budd.

This strategy document makes the comprehensive case that the Charlotte metropolitan region — specifically the Kannapolis– Mooresville–Charlotte corridor — is the superior site for North Carolina's hub, outperforming the Research Triangle Park alternative on every criterion DIU uses to evaluate locations. It also establishes Charlotte as the natural anchor for a broader Southeast Defense Innovation Center with no current hub coverage.

Secretary Hegseth declared at Starbase that the Pentagon needs innovation to “come from anywhere and evolve with speed and purpose.” The Charlotte corridor is exactly that ‘anywhere’ — a region with world-class dual-use manufacturing, a newly operational defense research institute, proximity to SOCOM and the 18th Airborne Corps, and thousands of commercial companies that have never had a front door to the DoW marketplace. A DIU OnRamp Hub in Charlotte is how Secretary Hegseth’s mandate reaches the American South.

With \$2B in new DIU funding from the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, \$5M in NDAA authorization for North Carolina, and the Applied Research Institute (ARI) as the administrative vehicle, the resources, the mandate, and the moment are all aligned. Charlotte is ready.

SECTION 1 — WHAT IS A DIU ONRAMP HUB & WHY IT MATTERS

Understanding the DIU OnRamp Program

The Mission

DIU is the Pentagon’s commercial technology accelerator, organized under the Secretary of Defense and focused on one goal: getting non-traditional American companies’ best technologies into the

hands of warfighters faster than adversaries can adapt. OnRamp Hubs are DIU’s physical infrastructure for doing this at the regional level.

What an OnRamp Hub Provides

- A physical 'front door' for non-traditional companies, startups, and academia to connect with DoW mission partners
- Education on DoW acquisition pathways: OTAs, SBIRs, CSOs, FAR contracts
- Cyber hardening, Technology Readiness Level (TRL) assessments, adversarial capital screening
- Matchmaking between commercial technology and specific warfighter needs
- Access to funding, mentorship, and DoW acquisition expertise
- A structured accelerator program with cohorts, pitch events, and named DoW challenge problems

The Program's Scale and Trajectory

DIU launched the first five OnRamp Hubs in 2023 (Phoenix/AZ, Dayton/OH, Honolulu/HI, Wichita/KS, Renton/WA). Three more were added in FY2025 (Kentucky, Minnesota, Montana). North Carolina is specifically authorized in the FY2026 NDAA. The entire program is now administered by the Applied Research Institute (ARI) under a 5-year, \$600 million cooperative agreement.

8 Hubs Currently Operating	\$600M ARI Cooperative Agreement (5-yr)	\$2B New DIU Funding (One Big Beautiful Bill)	\$5M NDAA Auth for North Carolina
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The New Leadership Mandate — Owen West & Pete Hegseth

Under Secretary Pete Hegseth and new DIU Director Owen West (confirmed March 2026), the program has sharpened its mission focus considerably. West’s first memo narrowed DIU’s investment priorities to technologies where ‘speed, scale and lethality converge’ — specifically: high-end technologies for battlefield overmatch; capabilities that substitute machines for troops in harm’s way; and systems that can scale rapidly while lowering cost-per-kill metrics.

Hegseth Quote	Charlotte Corridor Response
“We need innovation to come from anywhere and evolve with speed and purpose.” — Starbase, TX, Jan. 2026	Thousands of dual-use commercial firms in the Southeast have never had a DoW front door. Charlotte opens it.
“The defense acquisition system, as you knew it, is dead.” — National War College, Nov. 2025	Charlotte’s non-traditional companies have never developed the risk-averse habits of legacy primes. They are the reform.
“We’ll be traveling from the shipyards of the coast to the factories of the heartland — a revival of our industrial base.” — Newport News, Jan. 2026	GM Defense + Hendrick ISV. Oerlikon AM. Siemens CATCH. The industrial base is already here.
“Advanced manufacturing, including 3D printing and additive manufacturing, to operational units” by 2026. — Army Reform Memo, 2025	The Charlotte corridor has one of the highest concentrations of industrial additive manufacturing in the nation.
“We’re going to make defense contracting competitive again.” — Industry Speech, Nov. 2025	Charlotte’s ecosystem is composed almost entirely of non-traditional companies — exactly the new entrants Hegseth wants.

SECTION 2 — THE STRATEGIC CASE FOR CHARLOTTE

The Case for Charlotte: Six Strategic Advantages

Advantage 1: Charlotte Answers the 'Anywhere' Mandate

DIU’s congressional mandate and Hegseth’s own words both call for reaching ecosystems outside established major tech hubs. The Senate Armed Services Committee specifically directed DIU to expand “to geographic areas that are not major technology and innovation hubs.” Charlotte’s innovation ecosystem is real, growing, and world-class in specific domains — but it is not nationally branded as a tech hub. That is a feature, not a bug, under DIU’s selection criteria.

Advantage 2: The Southeast Coverage Gap

The entire Southeast United States — a region of enormous military significance — has zero DIU OnRamp Hubs. Charlotte is the geographic and economic center of this gap:

8 NC Military Installations	4th Largest Active-Duty Military Population	20,000+ Veterans Entering NC Workforce Annually	\$146M NC University DoW R&D (FY2023)
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Fort Liberty (SOCOM, 18th Airborne Corps), Camp Lejeune, Cherry Point, Seymour Johnson AFB, and Shaw AFB are all within Charlotte’s regional catchment. No other Southern city can serve this military community as effectively.

Advantage 3: Ready-Now Platform — North Carolina Research Campus, Kannapolis

The most decisive single advantage Charlotte holds is a ready-made, immediately operational physical home for the hub: the North Carolina Research Campus (NCRC) in Kannapolis, 30 minutes north of Charlotte on I-85.

North Carolina Research Campus (NCRC) — Key Facts

- 350-acre multi-institutional campus on the former Cannon Mills Plant 1 site
- 310,000 sq ft Core Lab plus two additional buildings of lab, clinical, and office space
- 8 co-located universities: UNC Charlotte, NC State, Duke, NC A&T, NCCU, UNC-CH, UNC Greensboro, Appalachian State
- Rowan-Cabarrus Community College Advanced Technology Center on-site: mechatronics, additive manufacturing, robotics
- Venture capital firms and private startups already in residence
- Adjacent to I-85 with direct access to Charlotte, Greensboro, and RTP
- Existing research in biotechnology, human performance, materials science, data analytics — all defense-relevant

This eliminates the most common obstacle to standing up a new hub: the absence of suitable collaboration space. It exists today, is populated, has a workforce pipeline on-site, and sits in the heart of the dual-use manufacturing corridor.

Advantage 4: The Institutional Anchor — UNC Charlotte NDI3

In January 2026, UNC Charlotte — an R1 (Very High Research Activity) institution — launched the National Defense and Intelligence Innovation Institute (NDI3). NDI3 brings strengths in advanced manufacturing, cybersecurity, AI-enabled systems, unmanned systems, directed energy, and operational energy. UNC Charlotte also anchors the North Tryon Tech Hub in Uptown Charlotte, an applied innovation corridor integrating research, entrepreneurship, and workforce development.

NDI3 Launch Partners & Key People

- U.S. Army DEVCOM Ground Vehicle Systems Center
- Naval Surface Warfare Center Crane Division
- BigBear.ai • Corvid Technologies • AlphaTech Partners • Hendrick Technical Solutions
- Dr. Mesbah Uddin — Executive Director
- Jacqueline Selig-Gumtow — AI & Security Lead (30+ years intelligence community)
- Rick Hudson — National Security Liaison, Division of Research (Cambridge Security Initiative alumnus)
- IP Transition Leadership: former Deputy Undersecretary of Commerce / Deputy USPTO Director

Advantage 5: Dual-Use Manufacturing — Motorsports, Additive, and Defense Production

The Kannapolis–Concord–Mooresville corridor is simultaneously the nation’s motorsports engineering capital and a world-class advanced manufacturing center. This combination has profound dual-use defense implications — and no other DIU hub city can claim anything like it.

Dual-Use Industrial Assets in the Corridor

- GM Defense + Hendrick Motorsports: manufactures the U.S. Army Infantry Squad Vehicle (ISV) in Concord TODAY
- General Motors Formula 1 power-unit facility opening near Hendrick Motorsports 2026–2027
- Keselowski Advanced Manufacturing, Joe Gibbs Racing, Team Penske, Richard Childress Racing: world-class rapid prototyping
- Oerlikon AM: 125,000 sq ft additive manufacturing hub; close research partnership with UNC Charlotte
- Siemens CATCH: additive manufacturing and digital manufacturing acceleration hub in Charlotte
- Jabil Inc.: new advanced manufacturing facility in Rowan County for cloud and AI data center infrastructure
- Eli Lilly: \$2B pharmaceutical production facility in Concord (2024) — biodefense-relevant
- Corning Optical Communications: Charlotte HQ; fiber optic and broadband manufacturing in Hickory
- Corvid Technologies: high-performance computing; secure manufacturing expansion; NDI3 launch partner

Advantage 6: Financial Capital, Connectivity, and Convening Power

- Charlotte is the second-largest financial center in the U.S. (Bank of America, Truist, Wells Fargo East Coast HQ), with defense-focused venture capital in TFX Capital, AlphaTech Partners, and Sparta Wealth Partners.

- Charlotte Douglas International Airport provides direct daily service to all five current DIU office cities: Silicon Valley, Austin, Boston, Chicago, and the Pentagon.
- Six Southeast ports within regional reach: Charleston, Wilmington, Savannah, Morehead City, Georgetown, and Brunswick — Charlotte is the inland logistics capital for the entire coastal defense manufacturing network.
- World Military Games 2027: Charlotte will host military teams from 100+ nations in June–July 2027 — the world’s largest defense community gathering, right here.
- Pisgah Astronomical Research Institute (PARI) near Asheville: former NASA/NSA satellite tracking facility with four 26-meter radio telescopes — a unique space and communications defense asset in western NC.

SECTION 3 — CHARLOTTE VS. RESEARCH TRIANGLE PARK

The Competitive Analysis: Why Charlotte Beats RTP

The Research Triangle Park has expressed confidence in its candidacy for the North Carolina DIU hub. A candid, evidence-based comparison reveals that Charlotte is the superior choice on every criterion DIU uses for site selection — and that RTP’s apparent strengths are precisely the characteristics DIU’s mandate says to avoid.

DIU Selection Criterion	Research Triangle Park	Charlotte Corridor
Not a major tech hub (Congressional mandate)	✗ DISQUALIFYING: RTP is the largest research park in America. IBM, Cisco, GSK, Biogen. Nationally branded major tech hub.	✓ QUALIFYING: World-class in specific domains but not nationally branded as a major tech hub. Exactly what the mandate describes.
Ready-now physical infrastructure	△ RTP 3.0 redevelopment just received zoning approval Nov. 2025. Development applications begin mid-2026. Mid-transformation.	✓ NCRC in Kannapolis exists today: 350 acres, 8 universities, community college on-site. Operational immediately.
Military proximity & operational relevance	△ Army Research Office at RTP — a research function. Limited direct installation proximity.	✓ Fort Liberty (SOCOM), Camp Lejeune, Cherry Point, Seymour Johnson, Shaw AFB all within regional catchment.
Warfighter-relevant technology (West’s ‘speed, scale, lethality’ mandate)	△ RTP ecosystem: pharma, biotech, software. Not primarily manufacturing or rapid-iteration physical tech.	✓ Motorsports engineering iterates in days. GM Defense ISV is a live proof of concept. Additive manufacturing at scale.
Geographic additionality (Southeast coverage gap)	△ A Raleigh hub serves the Piedmont Triad alongside the Army Research Office already there.	✓ A Charlotte hub serves the entire Southeast: SC, TN, AL (Huntsville), GA, western NC — a region with no hub.
Named local delivery partner (required for selection)	△ NC State proposed a new defense institute Feb. 2026. Not yet operational.	✓ ND13 launched January 2026. Operational with federal and industry partners NOW.

The Strategic Argument in One Sentence:

RTP is exactly what DIU's congressional mandate says not to duplicate. Charlotte is exactly what it says to find.

SECTION 4 — LESSONS FROM PHOENIX & SEATTLE: WHAT CHARLOTTE MUST GET RIGHT

Lessons from the Program's Two Strongest Models

The Phoenix (Arizona) and Seattle/Renton (Washington) OnRamp Hubs are the program's most-cited success models. Five replicable lessons emerge from their experience — and Charlotte's proposal maps onto each.

Lesson 1: Name a Credible Local Delivery Partner — Before You Apply

DIU does not run hubs directly — it selects trusted local operators. Phoenix uses EndRamp; Seattle uses the Pacific Northwest Defense Coalition; Kentucky selected the University of Louisville. Charlotte's proposal must walk in with this structure already agreed and named.

Charlotte's Proposed Delivery Structure

- Lead Operator: NDI3 at UNC Charlotte — institutional credibility, federal relationships, R1 research capacity
- Operational Partner: NC Military Business Center (NCMBC) — statewide defense network, SBIR expertise, technology scouting
- Physical Host: North Carolina Research Campus, Kannapolis — ready-now infrastructure, 8 universities, workforce pipeline
- Administrative Vehicle: Applied Research Institute (ARI) — the \$600M cooperative agreement holder. Engagement MUST begin immediately.
- Key Contact at ARI: Caleb Bonham — Caleb.Bonham@TheARI.us • 970.556.3058

Lesson 2: Lead with Military Proximity — The Arizona Formula

The Arizona hub's official positioning leads with one asset above all others: strategic location near six military installations and key DoW mission partners, with access to 2,500 defense contractors. Charlotte mirrors this exactly. The proposal should open every section with this military proximity framing — it is the language DIU scores on.

Lesson 3: Launch a Named Flagship Accelerator on Day One — The Seattle Model

The Washington hub distinguished itself by immediately launching a Defense Tech Accelerator Challenge: 4-month competitive accelerator, up to 8 finalists, \$15K per finalist, tailored DoW mentorship, DoW acquisition curriculum. Graduates gained access to SBIRs, OTAs, and CRADAs.

Charlotte should propose four named accelerator tracks from day one:

- Advanced Manufacturing & Rapid Prototyping Track — motorsports firms, Oerlikon AM, Siemens CATCH
- Cybersecurity & Critical Infrastructure Track — UNC Charlotte's utility/EPRI partnerships, Army Tactical Microgrid Standard
- AI & Autonomous Systems Track — NDI3's AI Institute, BigBear.ai partnership, Charlotte fintech AI talent

- Human Performance & Biotech Track — NCRC, U.S. Performance Center, Wake Forest School of Medicine—Charlotte

Lesson 4: Target First-Time DoW Vendors — The Core DIU Constituency

88% of DIU contract awardees are non-traditional defense contractors. 68% are small businesses. 40% are first-time DoW vendors. This is Charlotte’s exact business community profile — SMBs in fintech, manufacturing, biotech, and logistics with applicable capabilities and zero DoW footprint. The proposal should quantify this pipeline using data from the Carolina DoW Vendor Database.

Lesson 5: Name a Specific Regional Defense Problem — The Seattle Hallmark

The Seattle hub’s most memorable early programming was a pitch event with the Washington Air National Guard around a hyperlocal challenge problem. DIU rewards proposals that demonstrate existing integration with the defense community. Charlotte’s equivalent:

Proposed Charlotte Challenge Event

- Partner with Fort Liberty’s U.S. Army Special Operations Command (SOCOM) or 18th Airborne Corps
- Identify 2–3 specific technology challenges where Charlotte corridor manufacturing, energy, or cyber capabilities offer distinctive solutions
- The GM Defense / Hendrick ISV relationship provides an ideal existing template for this kind of joint programming
- Announce a named challenge event BEFORE the hub formally opens — signals operational seriousness to the DIU selection team

SECTION 5 — THE SOUTHEAST DEFENSE INNOVATION CENTER

Charlotte as Anchor of the Southeast Defense Innovation Center

A Charlotte hub would not serve a single metro area — it would activate a regional ecosystem stretching from the Appalachian Mountains to the coastal plain, and from Virginia to Alabama. No other proposed hub location in the Southeast can make this claim.

Sub-Region	Key Defense Innovation Assets
Charlotte Metro & Mecklenburg County	NCRC, NDI3, GM Defense/Hendrick ISV, Oerlikon AM, Siemens CATCH, financial capital, biotech (The Pearl, Wake Forest, IRCAD)
Western North Carolina (Asheville, Hickory)	Corning Optical fiber/broadband manufacturing; Pisgah Astronomical Research Institute (former NASA/NSA facility); fast-growing Asheville tech hub
Upstate South Carolina	BMW, Michelin, Lockheed Martin, Milliken; Clemson ICAR automotive research; Shaw AFB; one of the nation’s premier advanced manufacturing regions
Eastern NC Military Complex	Fort Liberty (SOCOM, 18th Airborne Corps), Camp Lejeune, MCAS Cherry Point, Seymour Johnson AFB, MCAS New River — special operations and expeditionary warfare expertise

Greater Southeast (Tier 2 Reach)	Huntsville AL (Army Redstone Arsenal, NASA Marshall); Oak Ridge National Laboratory TN; Savannah River National Laboratory SC; Fort Stewart GA; JB Charleston SC
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This corridor represents tens of thousands of manufacturers, researchers, entrepreneurs, and defense contractors who currently lack a structured pathway into the DoW marketplace. A Charlotte OnRamp Hub is the front door the entire region has been waiting for.

SECTION 6 — DECISION MAKERS & ADVOCACY STRATEGY

Who Decides and How to Reach Them

The Three-Layer Decision Structure

The hub designation involves three distinct decision layers. All three must be engaged simultaneously and in the right sequence. Working one layer without the others risks losing the decision to a better-coordinated competitor.

Layer	Decision Maker(s)	Role & Lever
Layer 1 The Ultimate Authority	Owen West, DIU Director (confirmed March 2026) Entry: Sarah Pearson, DIU Commercial Engagement Director	West makes the final hub selection decision. Reports directly to SecDef Hegseth. His mandate: 'speed, scale, lethality.' Frame Charlotte as the fastest, most operationally ready option in the Southeast. Entry point: Sen. Budd's office requesting a briefing with West.
Layer 2 The Administrative Gatekeeper	David Roberts, CEO Applied Research Institute (ARI) Contact: Caleb Bonham Caleb.Bonham@TheARI.us 970.556.3058	ARI holds the \$600M cooperative agreement and manages hub operations. In practice, ARI has significant influence over which locations are operationally feasible. Charlotte MUST have a direct ARI relationship before a formal proposal is submitted.
Layer 3 The Congressional Pressure Mechanism	Sen. Ted Budd (R-NC) Sen. Thom Tillis (R-NC) Rep. Pat Harrigan (NC-10) Gov. Josh Stein (NC)	The entire NC delegation already signed the 2024 letter to DIU. The critical next step: Budd and Harrigan must explicitly name Charlotte (not just NC) in direct communications with West's office. Budd's SASC membership gives him direct budget leverage over DIU.

The Advocacy Sequence

The timing and order of advocacy actions matters as much as the content. The following sequence is designed to create maximum pressure at the moment of decision without appearing combative or premature:

Phase & Timing	Actions Required
Phase 1 Foundation (April–May 2026)	1. Secure written letter of commitment from NDI3 (Dr. Uddin + Rick Hudson) 2. Secure letter of commitment from NCRC as physical host 3. Initiate direct contact with ARI (Caleb Bonham)

	to discuss Charlotte’s proposal 4. Brief Sen. Budd’s office — request they name Charlotte specifically in future DIU communications
Phase 2 Coalition (May–July 2026)	5. Charlotte Regional Business Alliance formal letter of support 6. NC Military Business Center (NCMBC) formal endorsement 7. World Affairs Council of Charlotte endorsement 8. Gov. Josh Stein / EDPNC state-level endorsement 9. UNC Charlotte Chancellor Sharon Gaber public statement
Phase 3 Public Campaign (July–Sept. 2026)	10. Launch Southeast Defense Innovation Center newsletter (see Editorial Calendar) 11. Build vendor database to 500+ companies (demonstrates market depth to DIU) 12. Host first Charlotte Defense Innovation Roundtable with installation commanders
Phase 4 Formal Proposal (Fall 2026)	13. Submit formal application through ARI with NDI3 as named operator, NCRC as named facility 14. Request site visit from Owen West’s office / DIU Commercial Engagement Director 15. Business community letter-signing campaign (target: 200+ signatories) 16. Coordinate Sen. Budd to submit formal letter to DIU naming Charlotte

The Private vs. Public Messaging Strategy

The Charlotte vs. RTP competition should be handled carefully. Public statements should remain entirely positive — Charlotte is the right choice, and here is why. The direct disqualification argument (RTP is exactly what the congressional mandate says not to duplicate) should be made privately in congressional offices and DIU briefings, not in public materials that could appear combative. This distinction is essential for maintaining working relationships with colleagues across the state who will be partners regardless of the outcome.

SECTION 7 — COMMUNICATION & VENDOR OUTREACH STRATEGY

Building the Pipeline: Communication Platform & Newsletter

Strategic Frame

The website and newsletter should not be positioned as 'waiting for a hub.' The stronger frame is: Charlotte IS already the Southeast defense innovation hub. The DIU OnRamp designation is simply the formal recognition of what already exists. This positioning attracts vendors now, builds credibility with DIU, and maintains momentum regardless of federal timeline.

Three-Tier Audience

Audience Tier	Description & Messaging Approach
Tier 1 Current DoW Vendors	Companies already winning DoW contracts in NC/SC. Identified via USASpending.gov. Need: market intelligence, networking, new opportunity alerts. Messaging: connect them to DIU’s Commercial Solutions Openings (CSOs) and OTA opportunities.
Tier 2 SAM-Registered, Non-Winning	Companies registered in SAM.gov but not yet winning contracts. Need: education on OTAs, SBIRs, acquisition pathways, CMMC requirements. Messaging: demystify the

	pathway. Connect them to NCMBC and accelerator programming.
Tier 3 Dual-Use, Unregistered	Commercial companies with applicable capabilities who have never engaged DoW. Need: inspiration, demystification, first step guidance. Messaging: 'Your company may already be a defense asset. Here's the door.' This is the most valuable OnRamp population.

The Biweekly Newsletter — 12-Month Editorial Plan

A biweekly newsletter (26 issues, April 2026–March 2027) anchors the communication platform. Key structural elements:

- Each issue built around a federal procurement timing hook — SBIR windows, NDAA cycles, end-of-fiscal-year sprints, budget submission seasons
- Standing sections in every issue: Contract Opportunity of the Week, OTA Alert, DIU CSO Tracker, Charlotte Corridor News, Glossary Term
- Four anchor theme categories recurring throughout the year: Education (SAM, OTA, CMMC, SBIR), Market Intel (installation spending data, sector analysis), Procurement (end-of-year opportunities, NDAA provisions), Spotlight (vendor profiles, community stories)
- Year-arc structure: Q1 launches and educates; Q2 builds and connects; Q3 activates around end-of-fiscal-year opportunities; Q4 advocates for the hub designation and closes the year

Key Newsletter Issues — Highest Priority

- Issue 1 (Apr. 2, 2026): Launch — Welcome to the Southeast Defense Innovation Center
- Issue 6 (Jun. 11, 2026): SBIR Season — The \$4 Billion Small Business On-Ramp to Defense R&D
- Issue 8 (Jul. 9, 2026): Policy — Senator Budd’s \$5M: What the NDAA Means for the Charlotte Hub
- Issue 11 (Aug. 20, 2026): Q4 Sprint — End-of-Fiscal-Year Spending: How to Position for Awards
- Issue 25 (Mar. 5, 2027): Advocacy Capstone — Business Community Letter-Signing Campaign

The Vendor Pipeline Database

A structured database of Carolina DoW vendors, built from USASpending.gov, SAM.gov, SBA DSBS, and NCMBC data, provides the quantitative case to DIU that the Southeast has a deep, ready pipeline of non-traditional companies. Key search parameters and database schema have been developed and are maintained in the Carolina DoW Vendor Database spreadsheet.

Data Source	What It Yields	Database Tier
USASpending.gov (DoW + NC/SC + FY2022-24)	Current vendors with contract history, dollar values, installation relationships	Tier 1: Current Vendors
SAM.gov Entity Search (NC + SC registered entities)	Companies registered to do federal business but not yet winning contracts	Tier 2: SAM Registered
Charlotte Regional Business Alliance SC	Dual-use commercial companies with no federal footprint — the OnRamp prime candidates	Tier 3: Dual-Use Unregistered

Manufacturers Alliance NCMBC Member Lists		
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SECTION 8 — STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS & TOOLS PRODUCED

Project Deliverables: Documents and Tools Completed

The following strategic documents and operational tools have been developed in support of this project and are available for immediate use:

Document / Tool	Description & Purpose
DIU Charlotte Executive Summary v2.0 (Word)	Comprehensive 12-section advocacy document presenting the full Charlotte case: funding landscape, six strategic advantages, NCRC ready-now platform, Southeast corridor scope, ecosystem readiness table, Phoenix/Seattle lessons, legislative path, and Hegseth-aligned conclusion. Primary document for congressional briefings and DIU presentations.
NDI3 Planning Document (Source: NDI3)	Original planning document from NDI3 at UNC Charlotte describing the Kannapolis– Mooresville–Charlotte corridor case. Incorporated into the Executive Summary v2.0.
Carolina DoW Vendor Database (Excel Workbook)	4-tab workbook: USASpending search guide with step-by-step instructions and 33 NAICS codes; Master Vendor Database schema with 28 fields, dropdown validations, and conditional tier formatting; NAICS Quick Reference; Pipeline Dashboard with live counters. Foundation for the market depth argument to DIU.
12-Month Editorial Calendar (Excel Workbook)	4-tab workbook: 26-issue biweekly calendar April 2026–March 2027 with full issue plans; Federal Procurement Calendar with 20 recurring events and urgency ratings; Standing Sections production guide; 14-day production workflow.
This Strategy Document (Word)	Master strategy reference integrating all research, competitive analysis, decision-maker intelligence, advocacy sequence, communication plan, and tools inventory into a single navigable document.

Key Research Findings on Record

- DIU Hub Selection Criteria (from DefenseScoop/NSIN source): robustness of defense innovation ecosystem; relevance to DoW needs; health of innovation ecosystem; expressed demand signal; absence of similar facilities; expressed Pentagon demand.
- ARI Contact for Hub Proposals: Caleb Bonham — Caleb.Bonham@TheARI.us | 970.556.3058
- DIU Commercial Engagement Contact: Sarah Pearson (Commercial Engagement Director) | media@diu.mil
- RTP Vulnerability: RTP 3.0 redevelopment just received zoning approval November 2025; development applications not expected until mid-2026. Charlotte NCRC is operational now.
- The 'Not a Major Tech Hub' Mandate: Senate Armed Services Committee directed DIU to expand 'particularly to geographic areas that are not major technology and innovation hubs.' RTP is the largest research park in America — this language could directly disqualify it.

- Owen West’s mandate (first memo as DIU Director, March 2026): concentrate on 'speed, scale, and lethality' — high-end overmatch tech, systems that substitute machines for troops, systems scalable at low cost within three years.

SECTION 9 — IMMEDIATE ACTION PLAN

The Next 90 Days: Priority Actions

The window for Charlotte to establish a decisive lead over any competing site is the next 90 days. The following actions are sequenced for maximum strategic effect:

Priority	Action Item	Owner / Deadline
P1 — CRITICAL	Contact ARI directly: Caleb Bonham (Caleb.Bonham@TheARI.us). Introduce the Charlotte/NCRC proposal. Request a briefing call. This is the administrative front door and cannot wait.	SEDIC — April 2026
P1 — CRITICAL	Brief Sen. Budd’s office. Ask them to name Charlotte (not just NC) in all future DIU communications. Provide the Executive Summary v2.0. Coordinate with Sen. Budd’s staff liaison for SASC matters.	SEDIC + Alliance — April 2026
P1 — CRITICAL	Meet with Rick Hudson at UNC Charlotte NDI3. Confirm NDI3 as named lead operator. Request a written letter of intent. Discuss NCRC as the physical facility.	SEDIC — April 2026
P2 — HIGH	Contact NCRC leadership. Request a letter of commitment as the physical host. This is the Charlotte proposal’s most decisive material advantage and it needs to be documented.	SEDIC + NDI3 — April–May 2026
P2 — HIGH	Verify Tate Nurkin’s role with NDI3 directly through Rick Hudson. Nurkin (founder OTH Intelligence Group, CSBA/Atlantic Council Senior Fellow) is a Charlotte-based defense analyst who may strengthen the advisory structure.	SEDIC — April 2026
P2 — HIGH	Engage NCMBC as operational co-partner. NCMBC’s statewide network, technology scouting programs, and SBIR assistance capacity are essential to the hub’s value proposition.	SEDIC — May 2026
P2 — HIGH	Launch the newsletter (Issue 1, April 2, 2026). Establish the Charlotte defense innovation communication platform before the formal advocacy	SEDIC — April 2, 2026

	campaign begins. Subscriber base = proof of market demand.	
P3 — IMPORTANT	Charlotte Regional Business Alliance formal briefing. Request their active co-sponsorship of the hub bid and a formal letter of support addressed to DIU Director Owen West.	SEDIC + ND13 — May 2026
P3 — IMPORTANT	Begin building the Carolina DoW Vendor Database to 200+ companies using the USASpending search guide. A documented pipeline of 200+ dual-use companies is a material differentiator in any DIU application.	SEDIC — Ongoing through June 2026
P3 — IMPORTANT	Engage Rep. Pat Harrigan (NC-10, Charlotte metro). His district is the hub location. He should be actively championing Charlotte to DIU in coordination with Sen. Budd.	SEDIC — May 2026

The Bottom Line

Charlotte and the Southeast are not asking DIU to take a risk on an unproven region. They are asking DIU to recognize what is already here: the nation’s second-largest financial center, a newly launched R1 defense research institute, an operational multi-university research campus with a workforce college on-site, a motorsports corridor already producing military vehicles, a congressional champion, and a gap in the national defense innovation map that no other city is better positioned to fill.

Phoenix showed that military proximity and industrial depth win. Seattle showed that a named accelerator and a real operational problem win. Charlotte has both — and a ready-now platform at NCRC that neither Phoenix nor Seattle could claim at the time of their selection.

With \$2 billion in new DIU funding, \$5 million in NDAA authorization for North Carolina, and the ARI cooperative agreement as the administrative vehicle, the resources are in place. The case is made. The moment is now. Charlotte is ready.

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