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Carnegie Foundry, Carnegie Mellon and American Drone Manufacturers Launch Initiative to Supercharge America's Drone Manufacturing Base

The initiative leverages more than $50 million in Carnegie Mellon investments to help American manufacturers scale production through robotics, automation and advanced manufacturing



Drone warfare has fundamentally changed modern conflict, exposing one of America's most pressing defense industrial challenges: the ability to manufacture secure, domestically produced autonomous systems at the speed and scale national security now demands.

Today, Carnegie Foundry, a Pittsburgh-based venture studio that builds and scales companies, Carnegie Mellon University (CMU) and U.S. drone manufacturers announced a new national

initiative to build the advanced manufacturing capabilities needed to rapidly scale secure, domestically produced autonomous systems in the United States.

Leveraging more than $50 million in Carnegie Mellon investments in robotics, advanced manufacturing and commercialization infrastructure, the initiative brings together CMU's National Robotics Engineering Center (NREC), Carnegie Foundry and multiple leading U.S. drone manufacturers to create a new Autonomous Systems Manufacturing Platform (ASMP). This suite of AI-enabled robotics, manufacturing automation, digital engineering, inspection and testing capabilities is designed to help American manufacturers rapidly scale production of secure autonomous systems.

Rather than building another drone factory, the initiative creates an entirely new manufacturing capability for the United States: a production platform that helps American drone companies automate production, accelerate qualification and rapidly scale manufacturing without each company having to reinvent the same production technologies. The initiative will launch with ViDARR Inc. and Envision Technology, LLC — both of which are already supplying drones to the Department of War.

"America's ability to manufacture advanced autonomous systems is becoming a strategic advantage every bit as important as our ability to invent them," said CMU President Farnam Jahanian. "Carnegie Mellon has spent decades building world-leading capabilities in robotics, artificial intelligence and advanced manufacturing. This initiative brings those strengths together with leading industry partners to accelerate the next generation of autonomous systems manufacturing and strengthen the nation's innovation ecosystem."

The partnership builds on CMU and NREC's long legacy of service to the national security mission.

For nearly three decades, NREC has partnered with government and industry to solve some of the world's most complex engineering challenges. Its work has ranged from developing a robotic system for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to automate the placement of massive concrete mats protecting hundreds of miles of the Mississippi River, to pioneering autonomous technologies with

industry partners such as Caterpillar and hundreds of others. That experience in building first-of-their-kind engineering systems becomes the foundation for creating an innovative manufacturing capability for autonomous systems.

"Pennsylvania is uniquely positioned to lead the next generation of defense manufacturing," said U.S. Senator Dave McCormick. "No place brings together world-class robotics research, advanced manufacturing expertise, defense infrastructure and skilled workers like the Commonwealth does. Our goal with today's Defense and Innovation Summit is to bring those strengths together and ensure the technologies that protect America are built in America, while increasing high-value manufacturing jobs that will define our economic future."

The initiative builds on Carnegie Foundry's longstanding collaboration with NREC, which has already helped launch three Carnegie Foundry portfolio companies: Freespace Robotics, Thryve Labs and VoxEQ.

"America doesn't have a drone innovation problem. We have a drone manufacturing problem," said Robert J. Szczerba, founder and CEO of Carnegie Foundry. "Today, every company has to solve the same production challenges on its own. Our goal is to build a common manufacturing platform that gives American companies the tools to scale faster while continuing to compete through innovation."

The collaboration combines Carnegie Mellon's leadership in robotics, autonomy and manufacturing automation with Carnegie Foundry's venture-building model and the urgent needs of U.S. drone manufacturers. Together, the partners will develop precompetitive production technologies that improve throughput, quality, testing and scalability, for immediate deployment into American factories.

“ViDARR was built by people who have SOCOM experience using unmanned systems in real-world environments and understand what reliability actually means when stakes are high,” said Cliff Byrd, CEO of ViDARR. “CMU and NREC bring decades of robotics, automation and advanced manufacturing experience, and that lines up directly with where we are headed as a company. This partnership gives us the opportunity to strengthen domestic drone production, improve repeatability and help scale American-made systems that operators can trust.”

“Scalable, resilient manufacturing is becoming essential to maintaining America's advantage in autonomous systems," said Mark Belanger, President, Envision Technology, LLC. "Our partnership with Carnegie Mellon, NREC and Carnegie Foundry brings together complementary expertise in autonomous systems, advanced manufacturing and military operations to help strengthen America's industrial base and accelerate production of mission-ready autonomous systems.”

Drones are the starting point. The long-term vision is to establish Pennsylvania as the nation's hub for autonomous systems manufacturing, creating the technologies, production systems and industrial partnerships that enable America to build the next generation of autonomous aerial, ground and maritime systems at scale.

The partners expect to pursue a combination of private investment, strategic industry participation and public support aligned with national security, domestic manufacturing and regional economic development priorities.