

Foxconn: Potential suppliers' interest outpaces available information

[Jeff Bollier](#), USA TODAY NETWORK-Wisconsin Published 4:45 p.m. CT Dec. 7, 2017

At the New North Summit Thursday, a Foxconn official said northeast Wisconsin companies will be key to fulfilling the company's demands for materials and services once it begins production in Racine County. Dec. 7, 2017. Jeff Bollier/USA TODAY NETWORK-Wisconsin



(Photo: Jeff Bollier/USA TODAY NETWORK-Wisconsin)

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GREEN BAY - Much like it takes a village to raise a child, business leaders are saying it will take the state of Wisconsin to build and supply Foxconn Technology Group's Racine complex.

Alan Yeung, Foxconn's director of U.S. strategic initiatives, said the search for companies to fill an estimated \$1.4 billion demand for materials and services annually will include a meeting for potential companies in Green Bay in early 2018.

Yeung spoke about making initial connections with local companies during a presentation at Thursday's New North Summit at the KI Convention Center. Yeung didn't offer many of the details suppliers are after, so much as laud the state's manufacturing expertise as a major draw for Foxconn.

Yeung said site plans and finalizing financial arrangements have dominated the company's focus in recent weeks, but that northeastern Wisconsin companies will be key to helping the company ramp up North American production.

"In the next few months, I hope to be able to come back and spend more time with you and bring more colleagues with me so we can talk partnership and opportunity," said Yeung, a 1984 University of Wisconsin graduate. "We see this area, this region, playing a vital role, not only for Wisconsin but for Upper Midwest. Racine and Mount Pleasant, those are very important places for us. ... But some of the jobs, some of the work, some of the partnership we look forward to forging will be in Milwaukee, in Madison, in Green Bay, will be further north and northwest throughout the whole state." New North Executive Director Jerry Murphy said the New North, Wisconsin Economic Development Corp. and the Northeast Wisconsin Manufacturing Alliance would coordinate with Foxconn to provide specific details and expectations necessary to know whether they can compete for Foxconn's business. He encouraged interested companies to sign up for the Wisconsin Supply Chain Marketplace website's Foxconn section.

"All the folks figuring out how to make that connection ... hopefully, we'll be able to pull together enough content to do that," Murphy said.

Foxconn uses vast amounts of water, chemicals and glass to make liquid crystal display panels. But it also will require all sorts of other materials, packaging and services. The opportunity Foxconn represents for the region's manufacturers came up throughout the day-long gathering.

Green Bay Packaging Inc. already does business with Foxconn via a plant in El Paso, Texas, but Executive Vice President Bryan Hollenbach wanted to learn more about the company's needs in Wisconsin.

"We feel it's very good for the state and a good opportunity for many companies in the region," Hollenbach said. "We look forward to building our relationship with them."

Lindquist Machine President and CEO Mark Kaiser said Foxconn represents an opportunity for northeastern Wisconsin manufacturers to take the next step as an advanced manufacturing powerhouse.

He said Lindquist, a specialist in automation systems, is interested in doing business with Foxconn, but that there's still a lot of hard work ahead.

"We're going to have to do the hard work necessary to land a new customer," Kaiser said. "Wisconsin's manufacturing base is well established and will give Foxconn a great base to leverage."

Gov. Scott Walker on Thursday encouraged northeastern Wisconsin companies to rise to the challenge of helping to build a \$10 billion campus in Racine County and supplying the global manufacturer's annual need for \$1.4 billion in materials and services.

"You need to be a part of it. There are not enough businesses, not enough contractors, not enough bodies to build something that big," Walker said. "Something this big, this transformational, will be a big deal in Racine, but it will be a bigger deal if we capitalize on it across Wisconsin."

It's still early on in the process and Foxconn's exact needs remain unclear. But Northeast Wisconsin Manufacturing Alliance Director Ann Franz said Yeung's presence at Thursday's summit bodes well for the future.

"I think it's very telling Foxconn has taken the time to come up to northeast Wisconsin," she said. "We really feel our companies can be an instrumental part of Foxconn's supply chain because we really are a world class manufacturing center."

NEWMA officials presented Yeung with one of its "World Class Manufacturing Center" flags as a reminder of the region's expertise and readiness to meet their needs.

Franz delivered the annual update to the Alliance's manufacturing index Thursday that bodes well for the near future. She said a record number of member companies plan to invest in new equipment or production capacity and 57 percent expected to hire more employees in the first quarter of 2018.

She said those investments will help prepare the region for an influx of business in the future.

"It's not just about Foxconn. (Our manufacturers) are doing very well with business throughout the world. They're hiring in significant numbers," Franz said. "We have a little time (before Foxconn comes online), but that's why understanding more of their needs is important."

Green Bay Mayor Jim Schmitt focused on building a longer-term connection between Foxconn and the Brown County region. He said he, and others, think there will be opportunities to land future Foxconn plants in the area.

"We want to look at it as a region, one that very much wants to partner with them," Schmitt said. "It's an opportunity to really work together. I'm hopeful we can set a new standard for showing we can work with international companies as a region and as a state."