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[Nebraska] Innovation Studio coordinating army of makers for PPE [personal protective equipment] projects

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Innovation Studio coordinating army of makers for PPE projects



While assembling **up to 1,800 face shields** (<https://news.unl.edu/newsrooms/today/article/nebraska-u-makers-step-up-to-equip-healers/>) a day, staff at **Nebraska Innovation Studio** (<https://innovationstudio.unl.edu/nebraska-innovation-studio>) are also assisting coordination of an army of community workers and volunteers to make more personal protective equipment, namely gowns for first responders and fabric masks for essential workers.

After the success of the face shield project, Innovation Studio staff started fielding requests for new projects — chief among them: protective gowns for first responders.

“The Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department heard about the (face shield) project and reached out to us asking if we would be willing to produce gowns for first responders, meaning the fire departments and EMTs, and possibly expand to hospitals and clinics,” Jerry Reif, studio manager, said.

He went to the drawing board, and through trial and error with different sizes, shapes and types of materials, developed a prototype made of Tyvec — better known as house wrap —

and enlisted Lincoln's Fire Station No. 1 to test it out.

"I made 10 gowns, sent them out to the Lincoln Fire Department, and they wore them over the weekend and said they worked," Reif said. "I cut out more cardboard templates and we started producing them on a mass scale."

Reif and some Innovation Studio workers — including student workers still on campus — hand-cut and sewed 150 gowns in-house.

"With the size of gowns, you have to have an eight-by-eight work surface, and there is not a machine here that could cut out a full suit, so we went back to basics and hand-cut them," Reif said.

But the face shield project takes up nearly all of the work hours and space available at Innovation Studio.

"We wanted to make sure that we were handling our primary mission, which was the face shields, and then help out other aspects of this where we could," he said.

Health department officials worked with Lincoln Public Schools to open a gymnasium at an elementary school, and Reif set up work spaces, made additional cardboard patterns and did training with custodial staff to show them the quickest way to cut the pieces.

"Now, about 300 suits are being cut per day, and those pieces are being delivered to community members with sewing machines to be sewn at home," Reif said. "Once finished, they're distributed across the city and county."

Nebraska Innovation Studio staff are also helping coordinate a large face mask project that will benefit law enforcement and state prison workers. The project is being spearheaded by Innovation Studio member Gary Young. His goal was to make 1,500 masks and had many volunteers to sew, but needed help getting the fabric cut.

"With our partnership with the VA, we were able to put Gary in touch with people there," Reif said. "We have veterans at home who want to help, and now they can."

Reif said all of the projects have been heavily dependent on community volunteers and veterans, as well as student workers and student members who've stayed on campus and want to help.

Innovation Studio staff have also relied on the partnerships that have developed since the facility opened its doors in 2015. Among them is Duncan Aviation, which is using its upholstery shop to sew PPE, and Snap-on, which donated 500 boxes for transporting the face shields and gowns safely. Midlands Packaging has also alleviated the shortage of clear plastic for face shields by acquiring medical-grade sheeting, while Firespring continues the die-cutting.

"We have had really good partnerships over the years with many companies, and they've stepped up in a big way to help us with these efforts, too," Reif said.

Full Story & Video>> (<https://news.unl.edu/newsrooms/today/article/innovation-studio-coordinating-army-of-makers-for-ppe-projects/>)

by **Deann Gayman | University Communication** (<https://news.unl.edu/written-by/deann-gayman-university-communication/>)