

START DOWNTOWN

At the heart of Dayton's comeback are talented people taking risks and shaping our city. You can find their stories in locally-run coffee shops, coworking spaces, entrepreneurial hubs, artist spaces, brewery tasting rooms, and the kitchens of local restaurants. A groundswell of entrepreneurial and creative activity is changing Dayton.

Seeing these efforts and appreciating their impact, the Downtown Dayton Partnership, City of Dayton, and the Dayton Development Coalition joined forces in 2016 to identify new projects, policies, and programs to help more people "start downtown". Over a series of townhall-style meetings and detailed work sessions, the Start Downtown initiative brought together more than 100 enterprising Daytonians to devise new strategies and grassroots projects to foster collaboration and connections between entrepreneurs and provide better support the creative culture rapidly emerging. Project outcomes are grouped into three categories:

- **Advocacy:** Volunteers prioritized their recommendations for how downtown could better support and grow entrepreneurial endeavors. A summary of those recommendations [is provided here](#).
- **Programs:** Talk isn't enough, so we also challenged Start Downtown volunteers to launch grassroots projects to help move our startup ecosystem forward. More detail on those projects is below.
- **Promoting an Entrepreneurial Culture:** The initiative helped distinguish downtown as a place that values and supports entrepreneurship. Because of this, the Dayton region's startup ecosystem is firmly rooted downtown.

Start Downtown has contributed to a turning point for our center city. It solidified the narrative for the economic activity that is the foundation of downtown's recovery, rallied the entrepreneurial community around the urban core's resurgence, and served as a clarion call for regional partners to get engaged in the creative and entrepreneurial initiatives underway.

PROJECT OUTCOMES: ADVOCACY

Of all the recommendations made by Start Downtown volunteers, the most impactful was the advocacy for a startup hub – i.e. a single space that would bring the best startup programs, resources, and talent under one roof. It has been well-documented by the Brookings Institute and others how the density of downtowns amplifies entrepreneurial and creative activity. Startup hubs are hyper-dense versions of this same phenomenon – facilitating collisions, collaboration, and serendipitous connections that nurture new ventures.

Last September this vision for a startup hub became a reality. The Air Force Research Lab (AFRL) and the Wright Brothers Institute (WBI) opened a 15,000 square-foot space in collaboration with The Entrepreneurs Center (TEC) in downtown Dayton. The hub offers flexible office space for startup companies and an environment where AFRL and WBI can co-locate teams with local startups and researchers from across the country. The newly opened space has become the beating heart for Dayton's startup community. [Project 444 was](#)

[recognized as one of six "Innovators"](#) at the Association of Defense Communities' Installation Innovation conference earlier this year.

However, Project 444 is just the first step towards the startup hub vision. Last April the University of Dayton (UD) and TEC [announced plans for an 80,000 square-foot innovation hub at the Dayton Arcade](#). Programming includes flexible space for hundreds of startups, artist workspaces and housing, and classrooms to support the move of UD's [eleventh-ranked entrepreneurship program](#) to downtown. The Arcade's restoration will start later this year, but already it is leading to increased interest from large employers to relocate downtown.

PROJECT OUTCOMES: NEW PROGRAMS

Pop-up Coworking: To demonstrate the value of a startup hub, volunteers launched a series of "pop-up coworking" events beginning in November of 2016. Each was hosted at a different downtown space – including a downtown brewery, local restaurants, and our new downtown library. Nine events later with close to 1,000 total attendees, the program now has a permanent home with our startup ecosystem partners at Project 444.

Kiva Dayton: To provide a funding outlet to help fuel the growth of service-based / non-tech startups, Start Downtown organized a Dayton-focused Kiva network. Kiva is like crowd-funding, but instead it's crowd-lending – after your loan is repaid, you can use the same dollars to support another small business. To bolster the impact of Kiva, an ecosystem partner contributed \$25,000 last September to [launch the Kiva Dayton Seed Fund](#).

Dayton Collaboration Network: In March of 2017 Start Downtown launched the Dayton Collaboration Network. The Network provides a conduit for subject matter experts, such as accountants, lawyers, marketing professionals, etc., to volunteer their time to support local entrepreneurs. Since the Network launch, 35 subject matter experts have donated consultation and business advice, contributing more than 150 hours to local startups.

#IStartedDowntown: Increasing the visibility of local entrepreneurs and risk takers is critical to growing an entrepreneurial culture. This video series shined a spotlight on some of the talented small business owners who are launching new endeavors in downtown Dayton. View the entire #IStartedDowntown video series [by clicking here](#).

PROJECT OUTCOMES: PROMOTING AN ENTREPRENEURIAL CULTURE

Dayton's entrepreneurial community has grown rapidly in the past two years. In addition to Start Downtown, several complementary initiatives were launched by regional partners. These efforts have led to greater focus on DoD technology commercialization, new events to create community between local entrepreneurs (including the first-ever Dayton Startup Week), and overall, a significant increase in the visibility of Dayton entrepreneurs. The Start Downtown initiative firmly established the center city as a place where entrepreneurship is valued and supported. Because of the messaging and partnerships facilitated through Start Downtown, almost all these new programs for Dayton entrepreneurs are happening downtown.