

Lynchburg Innovation Week Draws Hundreds of Business Professionals

Three-day event celebrated entrepreneurship, arts and culture and economic empowerment

In 2015, the Office of Economic Development identified two new areas of strategic focus that are primarily measured with qualitative metrics: entrepreneurship and economic empowerment. While the focus areas are included quantitatively in the Office's annual report, we realized that it is most impactful for Lynchburg's economic development stakeholders to hear, experience, and see the impact of economic development work in these areas.



On June 2-4, 2016, hundreds of Lynchburg business professionals gathered in Downtown Lynchburg at [Riverviews Artspace](#), a gallery and studio space for established and emerging artists, to celebrate the City's first Lynchburg Innovation Week. The three-day event featured a wide range of learning and networking opportunities to enhance and celebrate new strategies for economic development. Hosted by the Lynchburg Economic Development Authority, Lynchburg Innovation Week was organized by Cities Reimagined, which develops innovative economic development strategies and programming.

"Lynchburg Innovation Week was three days of interactive content and experiential learning that brought many new faces into the Riverviews Artspace to experience Lynchburg's economic development strategy in a personal, conversational way," said Alex Johnston, founder of Cities Reimagined. "We hope to continue providing opportunities for our entrepreneurs and local businesses to connect with one another and share their knowledge in meaningful ways."



Lounge and networking area provided by Moore + Giles, a fine leather company founded in 1933 in Downtown Lynchburg.

The true purpose of Lynchburg Innovation Week is to engage citizens in economic development by bringing together art, culture, and business and providing a platform to creatively solve community problems.

Community Business Launch and Pitch Night

Lynchburg Innovation Week opened with Lynchburg's first Pitch Night for graduates of CO.STARTERS, a nine-week entrepreneurial training program that

equips aspiring entrepreneurs with the insights, relationships, and tools needed to turn business ideas into action and turn a passion into a sustainable and thriving business. The opening night's events also featured local entrepreneurs who completed the CO.STARTERS curriculum. After pitching their business concepts, five local startups received Community Business Launch Grants valuing \$40,000: [The Craft Crucible](#), [Good Karma Tea and Wellness](#), [Mrs. Joy's Absolutely Fabulous Treats](#), [Benny Scarpetta's](#), and [Golf Park Coffee Co.](#) All five winners opened storefront businesses in Lynchburg's Enterprise Zone within five months of receiving startup funding.

"Ultimately, the intangibles were what probably mattered most. Meeting other small business owners and creating a little network of people tackling similar challenges," said Randy Smith, CO.STARTERS graduate and Community Business Launch recipient of funding for The Craft Crucible, a craft woodworking space in Midtown. "The grant has helped me tackle some of the big ticket items that I need for the space. With these tools, woodworkers, local hobbyists and amateurs will have access to tools and services that aren't as affordable or are too big for the average home shop."

Community Business Launch and the CO.STARTERS Pitch Night were funded in partnership with the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development.

18F and Community Workshops

Throughout Innovation Week, keynote presentations and workshops were provided by local businesses, including a Creative Design Workshop with developers from 18F, a screen-printing workshop through Vector Space, and a coder meetup organized by eDocument Solutions.



Good Karma Tea and Wellness pitched for \$10,500 in start-up funding through Community Business Launch.

On Friday, two content designers from [18F](#), the technology agency founded in 2014 in response to the crash of HealthCare.gov, led a design workshop with Lynchburg participants on innovative ways for citizen-driven technology change in the delivery of government services. 18F has worked with over 50 federal offices and agencies, on more than 200 engagements with the focus of transforming how the federal government delivers digital services and technology products.



California-based [eDocument solutions](#), who recently opened an office in Downtown Lynchburg, coordinated a Coder Meet-Up on Saturday for those interested sharing ideas to solve problems through technology – highlighting the growing number of tech-based workers in the City. "Lynchburg Innovation Week is just one of the many examples of our city's drive for excellence - both through encouraging entrepreneurship and innovation," said David Garza, Application Developer at eDocument Solutions and Lynchburg Innovation Week presenter. "eDocument Solutions is a

proud partner. We strive to help businesses of all sizes overcome everyday business process obstacles through innovation."

[Vector Space](#), Lynchburg's first maker space – a physical place for people interested in science, technology, engineering, art, and math to collaborate, invent, discover, and build the things that interest them – hosting a screen printing workshop with participants. The workshop, on a screen printing machine built by maker space members, guided attendees to print their very own Lynchburg Innovation Week t-shirt.

Attendees also enjoyed fresh food and coffee provided by local vendors. As part of Lynchburg's First Fridays art open house, Riverviews hosted live music on Friday night from Cabell Street Collective for Lynchburg Innovation Week.

Many local businesses and organizations worked together to make Lynchburg Innovation Week a success, including:

- eDocument Solutions - Sponsor and provided a coding meetup and workshop
- American National Bank - Sponsor
- Lynchburg Regional Business Alliance - Sponsor
- Region 2000 Workforce Development Board - Sponsor
- Lynchburg Business Magazine - Sponsor
- Moore & Giles - Curated a custom business lounge
- Cheesy Rider food truck
- Jacked Rabbit food truck
- Simply Irresistible - Desserts
- Riverviews Artspace
- Golf Park Coffee – coffee provider
- Lynchburg Economic Development Authority - Host
- Cities Reimagined – Organizer



The goals of Lynchburg Innovation were to highlight and showcase the work of the Office of Economic Development through interactive content in a personal, conversational way. A variety of activities provided opportunities to learn, network, and celebrate progressive economic development, integrate arts and technology as an economic sector, celebrate entrepreneurship and engage a new group of patrons who may not typically interact with the Office of Economic Development or its partners. The Office of Economic Development continues the focus on arts, technology, entrepreneurship and economic empowerment with partnerships throughout 2016 and 2017, including Create Lynchburg, a business conference for creative entrepreneurs, Vector Space's Scifest and Maker Faire at Randolph College and three more CO.STARTERS cohorts.