

Innovation in Red Wing

In 2010, the mayor and community leaders of Red Wing, MN (population 16,400) sought a pathway of technology to grow their local economy. Without sufficient land to expand traditional agriculture or space to grow beyond existing manufacturing, the community needed new energy and to stimulate outside investment to stay competitive.

The Initiative

Beginning in 2012, US Ignite worked with Hiawatha Broadband Communications (a Minnesota-based gigabit broadband provider), the City of Red Wing, and community leaders to create Red Wing Ignite. This new collaboration was built to spur innovation by supporting entrepreneurs, businesses and students and leveraging gigabit technology through the following means:



- **Technical Assistance:** US Ignite provided in-person and remote coaching to secure financial support for the nonprofit innovation partner leading the effort to accelerate smart community development.
- **Capacity Building:** US Ignite staff coordinated closely with Red Wing Ignite to design and lead the “Agriculture Tech Challenge,” and one of the nation’s first rural hackathon. This empowered students, entrepreneurs, and businesses with innovation and energy, creating the foundation and infrastructure that would soon scale to become a “tech hub” for the area.
- **Model Practices:** US Ignite shared working frameworks and processes from other Smart Gigabit Communities (SGCs) that brought together local entrepreneurs, investors, and advisors. Red Wing Ignite’s leadership worked with community partners to support local innovation and regional economic development through new company creation.

“Red Wing Ignite’s role and leadership in driving initiatives and outcomes that improve the competitiveness of Red Wing, the Region, and Minnesota is truly commendable. Ignite Minnesota brought national attention to Red Wing as a statewide hub developing a rural model supporting innovation.” – Senator Tina Smith, (MN)

The Results

As a result of this new focus on technology-informed economic development, Red Wing Ignite was created to implement a community development strategy and engage key stakeholders needed to spur innovation, including:

- **A broad base of support:** Red Wing Ignite established a 15-person steering group that includes local government, investors, schools, and businesses like Red Wing Shoes, 3M, Xcel Energy, and local broadband provider Hiawatha Broadband Communications (HBC).
- **Technology Infrastructure:** Red Wing Ignite launched a local business accelerator, opened a co-working space, and created high-tech job pathways with schools to leverage existing broadband investments.
- **Growing Talent Pipeline:** To train and retain local talent, Red Wing Ignite created “Learn and Earn.” This Youth Skills Training program expands the capability of high school students to make informed decisions about technical careers with regional global companies in advanced manufacturing. Employers are investing in developing a talent pipeline with 50 students participating over two years.

The Outcome

Red Wing delivered the following to develop a talent pipeline, advance entrepreneurship and strengthen local businesses:

- **New Funding and Support:** Red Wing Ignite's rural innovation and collaboration model secured almost \$1,750,000 in funding and in-kind support from the U.S. Economic Development Administration and partners to increase Red Wing Ignite's impact.
- **New Partnerships and Networks:** Red Wing Ignite leveraged its role as a convener to gather multi-sector business leaders and host investor events to showcase local innovation.
- **Workforce of the Future:** Students have been introduced to regional technical careers by gaining college credits and an industry credential at Minnesota State College SouthEast and exposure to new occupations through applied learning experiences with advanced manufacturing employer partners.
- **Economic development:** Third-party research from the Blandin Foundation showed that advanced, fiber-backed broadband increased residents' economic benefit more than \$32 million per year - \$1,850 annual benefit per household - and real estate values increased by more than \$100 million.

Related links

- ["Poultry Patrol" Robot Wins Inaugural Ag Tech Challenge](#)
- Video: [How a Four Wheeled Robot is Improving Farming in Minnesota](#)
- [Next farmhand in poultry barn could be a robot](#)
- [Viewpoint: MSC Southeast is building a destination campus for Industrial Craftsmanship and an Industrial Community.](#)

Select Partners

- [Red Wing Ignite](#)
- [Hiawatha Broadband Communications](#)
- [Blandin Foundation](#)
- [Minnesota State College Southeast](#)
- [City of Red Wing / Goodhue County](#)

About US Ignite

Launched in 2012, US Ignite is a national nonprofit that spurs the creation of next-generation applications and services that leverage advanced networking technologies. Working with smart communities across the globe, US Ignite accelerates smart city projects and applications, innovation, and economic development in local and regional ecosystems. US Ignite provides technical assistance for smart city pilot programs along with full-scale smart city and interconnected national deployments.