

## Roundtable Efforts: Collaboration | Communication | Results

With the objective of assisting individual companies in specific targeted clusters, EIGERlab has been organizing and developing roundtable focus groups intent

on identifying and addressing barriers to business growth. EIGERlab Roundtables are monthly discussions with community leaders, business owners and corporate executives in similar business clusters that identify pressing issues and outline collaborative short-term action plans to address them.



**Information Technology Roundtable meeting with Christopher Whitaker**

The concept behind bringing together groups of owners and leaders in similar types of businesses is to focus on common problems and barriers related to their business growth hindering their ability to grow, to create collaboration and trust, to understand collective resources and collaborate and to expand employee pools through community branding.

IT Roundtable member, Phil Wasson said, “The IT Roundtable has been an excellent opportunity to learn of local Information Technology resources that are available in the Rockford area. It also allows participants to learn about the varied needs and strategies of companies, non-profits, and government entities from right here in the Rockford region.”

As a result of a recent IT Roundtable Open Tech Challenge event (Hackathon), several apps were created to assist the City of Rockford and will be available to the community soon. These open tech challenges bring volunteer programmers and coders together to create apps that address specific social and governmental problems. The resulting phone apps are owned and utilized by our city, county or appropriate not-for-profits. Christopher Whitaker, civic technologist with Smart Chicago Collaborative and “White House Champion of Change for Civic Hacking” is instrumental in advocating for and spearheading these Hackathons.

521 Rockford, the newest of the roundtables, is comprised of 25 companies targeted at supporting and creating a more robust minority business community. The 521 Initiative (5 Planning Areas; 2 Business Enterprises; 1 mission) is targeted at growing and strengthening the Minority-owned Business Community in the Rockford Region. Excell Lewis, owner of XL Academics, who was instrumental in creating the foundation of 521 shared, “It is refreshing to see members of 521 reinvest in Greater Rockford. I am positive that the efforts of this initiative will assist in revitalizing small business ownership by creating sustainable jobs.”

TechWorks Manufacturing Roundtable discussions have resulted in the creation of a new training program—*FastTrack Assembly*—to assist with new workforce needs. Companies such as Leading Edge Hydraulics, Fastenal and GE Aviation meet on a regular basis to discuss topics such as employment and best practices. Russ Dennis, CEO of Leading Edge Hydraulics stated, “As an advisory council we are discussing economic and employment trends, which are beneficial to all involved in the business planning/forecasting process.”

Submitted by Sherry Pritz