

# Mayor's Startup & Entrepreneur Roundtable Summary Report

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**Prepared by:**  
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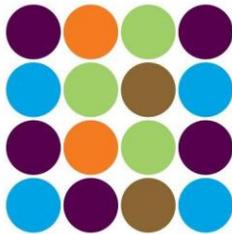


# City of Pittsburgh

## Innovation & Performance

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Mayor

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## 1. Purpose:

The purpose of the Mayor’s Startup & Entrepreneur Roundtable is to provide a forum for the City to engage the Startup community in order to discuss successes and current challenges facing Entrepreneurs and to brainstorm opportunities for collaboration. The Roundtable was recorded to help inform the public about the many successful Startups in Pittsburgh and the services and products they provide.



## 2. Event Description:

The [Startup & Entrepreneur Roundtable](#)<sup>1</sup> concluded the [Mayor William Peduto’s Innovation Roundtable Series](#)<sup>2</sup>, capping off a summer initiative to bring together innovators throughout Pittsburgh to highlight its place as a leading city of innovation. The other three roundtables were centered on the Maker Movement, Clean Technology, and Accelerator & Co-working Spaces.

The leaders and founders of six startups currently calling Pittsburgh home were featured presenters, and a group discussion was moderated by local serial entrepreneur **Kit Mueller of RustBuilt**. Both the presentation and discussion were recorded for rebroadcast on the **City Cable** and **YouTube Channels**, and was live tweeted by the **Department of Innovation & Performance (@PghIP)** as well as a number of attendees using the hashtag #PGHStartups.



<sup>1</sup> (City of Pittsburgh 2014)

<sup>2</sup> (City of Pittsburgh 2014)

a. Introduction:

- **Mayor William Peduto and Innovation & Performance Director Debra Lam** gave brief introductions to the roundtable outlining the goals and initiatives of the Mayor's Innovation Roundtable Series, how the Startup Roundtable fit into that vision and offered a collaborative hand from the City to the Startup community.
- **Jennifer Wilhelm; Innovation and Entrepreneurship Strategist at the URA of Pittsburgh** introduced each of the speakers, detailing their differing fields and backgrounds.

*As a member of Pittsburgh's growing entrepreneurial community, I am thrilled to participate in this event and see Mayor Peduto support job creation and innovation here in our city.*

*– Anne Lopez; CEO – Romeo Delivers*

b. Presentation Topics and Speakers:

i. Why Pittsburgh?

1. Dick Zhang; President and CEO - [Identified Technologies](#)



- a. Dick Zhang founded Identified

Technologies in 2013 and is the current President and CEO. He is a mechanical engineer by training from the University of Pennsylvania and has project management experience from Goldman Sachs and Bristol-Myers Squibb. In his spare time he enjoys playing golf and billiards.

2. Luke Skurman; CEO - [Niche.com](#)



- a. Luke Skurman is the CEO and Founder of Niche. Niche provides in-depth reviews and analysis on schools and neighborhoods it is one of the largest content start-ups in the US. Luke is the youngest trustee in the history of Carnegie Mellon. Luke is a Co-Founder and Chairman of Thrill Mill.

ii. How can your business grow?

1. [Anne Lopez](#); CEO - [Romeo Delivers](#)



- a. As the CEO of Romeo Delivers, Anne is working to create jobs and contribute to the culture of innovation that is part of the city's heritage. She brings her experience from many fields including fine art, advertising, manufacturing and academia to her entrepreneurial endeavors. She holds a BFA from Carnegie Mellon and a MFA from Cranbrook Academy.

2. Kevin Dowling; VP of Engineering - [4moms](#)
  - a. Dr. Dowling is the VP of Engineering for 4moms. Previously he was VP of R&D at Cambridge-based MC10, VP of Strategic Technologies for Philips Color Kinetics, Chief Robotics Engineer at PRI Automation, and Scientist at Carnegie Mellon University. He has over 65 US Patents and received his BS in Math, and MS and PhD in Robotics from Carnegie Mellon.



iii. What types of businesses can you create?

1. [Matthew Stanton](#); CEO - [SolePower](#)
  - a. Matt is the CEO of SolePower, a hardware startup commercializing power generating insoles. He is a graduate of Carnegie Mellon University where he co-founded SolePower with Hahna Alexander. SolePower has been awarded the Africa World Energy Conference's Innovation of Year Award, and was selected as the 2014 Popular Science Invention of the Year.



2. [Robb Myer](#); Founder & President – [NoWait](#)
  - a. Robb Myer is the President and Chief Product Officer of NoWait, the first and only mobile network for casual-dining restaurants, which he founded in 2010. Robb holds an MBA from Carnegie Mellon University's Tepper School of Business and a BS in electrical engineering from the University of South Florida.



Presenters spoke about the unique opportunities available to them in the City, as well as set the state for the discussion portion of the roundtable. Each presentation is available in its entirety on the City of Pittsburgh [YouTube Channel](#).<sup>3</sup> These presentations highlighted startups in varying sectors of Pittsburgh software products, hardware, and services.



<sup>3</sup> (City of Pittsburgh 2014)

c. Discussion Questions: After the presentations, the Roundtable opened up with three discussion questions for the attendees. Facilitator **Kit Mueller, Co-Creator of RustBuilt** was introduced by **Jennifer Wilhelm, Innovation and Entrepreneurship Strategist** at the URA of Pittsburgh. The topics for discussion were:

- i. What can Pittsburgh and Startups do to ensure civic openness to the communities from which they originate?
- ii. How can we encourage inclusion and diversity in Pittsburgh's startup community?
- iii. How can we ensure that Pittsburgh can be competitive in this sector regionally, nationally and internationally?



### 3. Communications

**The Department of Innovation & Performance** undertook a communications plan to inform the public of the ability to view the Startup & Entrepreneur Roundtable and provide feedback. There were a number of target audiences for the presentations and roundtable discussion; students who are looking to start a company in Pittsburgh after

graduation, current Startups, potential partners for growing awareness of Pittsburgh as one of the nation's top startup hubs and lastly, active citizens who are interested in what is happening in the City.

**Pittsblog** @pittsblog · Aug 13  
 Good idea #4 for @PghIP and #PGHStartups: Direct policy to agglomeration effects, not just individual companies. [ssrn.com/abstract=18587...](http://ssrn.com/abstract=18587...)

**Pittsblog** @pittsblog · Aug 13  
 Good idea #3 for @PghIP and #PGHStartups: Lower barriers to labor mobility. Make it easy to -- voluntarily -- find and change jobs.

**Pittsblog** @pittsblog · Aug 13  
 Good idea #2 for @PghIP and #PGHStartups : Make Pittsburgh newcomers and immigrants welcome and help them succeed.

**Pittsblog** @pittsblog · Aug 13  
 Congrats to Mayor @billpeduto for today's @PghIP focus on challenges facing #PGHStartups Good focus #1: make it easier to start a business.

The morning of the roundtable the **Mayor's Office** put out an Official [Press Release](#)<sup>4</sup> to notify the public of the event. The [Innovation and Performance Twitter Account](#) live tweeted the event using the hashtag **#PGHStartups**. Twitter was also used by attendees. This avenue of communication allowed the roundtable to be open to those not in attendance, as well serve as a method for those in attendance to highlight their own point of agreement.

On August 18, 2014, the full [Roundtable](#) was made available on the [City of Pittsburgh YouTube Channel](#)<sup>5</sup> and will be broadcast daily on the **City Cable Channel** after the Clean Technology and Co-working & Accelerator Roundtables have concluded their

<sup>4</sup> (McNulty, Mayor William Peduto Hosts Roundtable On Startup 2014)

<sup>5</sup> (City of Pittsburgh 2014)

run. [An article](#) recapping the roundtable was published on 13 August 2014 by the Pittsburgh Business Times.<sup>6</sup>

#### 4. Roundtable Attendees

Fig 5.1

| Name                       | Organization                                | Title  |
|----------------------------|---|--|
| Kevin Dowling              | <a href="#">4moms</a>                       | VP of Engineering                                    |
| Kelly Collier              | <a href="#">ActivAided Orthotics</a>        | CEO  |
| Jonathan Diven             | <a href="#">Atmosferiq</a>                  | CEO  |
| Andreas Beck               | <a href="#">Beyond Spots &amp; Dots</a>     | CEO  |
| Debra Lam                  | <a href="#">City of Pittsburgh</a>          | Director and Chief of Innovation & Performance       |
| Geoffrey Arnold            | City of Pittsburgh                          | Summer Associate                                     |
| Henry Pyatt                | City of Pittsburgh                          | Small Business & Redevelopment Manager               |
| R. Daniel Lavelle          | City of Pittsburgh                          | City Councilman                                      |
| Tara Matthews              | City of Pittsburgh                          | Summer Associate                                     |
| William Peduto             | City of Pittsburgh                          | Mayor  |
| Josh Lucas                 | <a href="#">Crowdasaurus</a>                | Founder  |
| Alex Gindin                | <a href="#">Emplified</a>                   | Founder  |
| Joe Vennare                | <a href="#">Pittsburgh</a>                  | Co-Founder   |
| Dick Zhang                 | <a href="#">Identified Technologies</a>     | President and CEO                                    |
| Kent McElhattan            | <a href="#">Industrial Scientific Corp.</a> | Co-Founder   |
| Luke Skurman               | <a href="#">Niche.com, Inc.</a>             | CEO  |
| Robb Myer                  | <a href="#">NoWait</a>                      | Founder & President                                  |
| Colin Huwyler              | <a href="#">Optimus Technologies</a>        | CEO  |
| David Martinsky            | Perpetual Motions Inc.                      | President  |
| Douglas Michael Hilling II | Phizzbo                                     | President  |
| Anne Lopez                 | <a href="#">Romeo Delivers</a>              | CEO  |
| Kit Mueller                | <a href="#">RustBuilt/Fygment</a>           | Co-Creator   |
| Nick End                   | <a href="#">Shoefitr</a>                    | Customer Experience Officer                          |
| Matthew Stanton            | <a href="#">SolePower</a>                   | CEO  |
| Ian Rosenberger            | <a href="#">Thread</a>                      | CEO & Founder  |
| Rick Cancelliere           | <a href="#">Treatspace</a>                  | CEO  |
| Jennifer Wilhelm           | <a href="#">URA of Pittsburgh</a>           | Innovation and Entrepreneurship Strategist           |
| Thomas Link                | URA of Pittsburgh                           | Director, Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship |
| Terrina Gogue              | <a href="#">Carey Group</a>                 | Consultant   |

<sup>6</sup> (Coyne 2014)

- a. The invite list was primarily gathered through nominations by attendees of the Mayor’s Accelerator & Co-working Space Roundtable, as well as input from the **Mayor’s Office, URA of Pittsburgh** and the **Department of Innovation & Performance**.
- b. This group was gathered in order to ensure a wide variety of industries, experiences and concerns would be contributed to the dialogue during the second half of the roundtable. The space within the Mayor’s Conference room limited the number of Startups able to attend. This meant only a small sample out of the numerous Startups that call Pittsburgh home were invited.

*Although I left Pittsburgh 15 years ago to be an entrepreneur, I came back a few months ago to join a great team at 4moms and help grow a great company into a really great company. Pittsburgh's entrepreneurial eco-system is now better but can become great. – Kevin Dowling; VP Engineering – 4moms*

## 5. Discussion

- a. Question 1: What can Pittsburgh and Startups do to ensure civic openness to the communities from which they originate?

Moderator **Kit Mueller** noted that Startups “cannot operate in a vacuum and we should effect the immediate communities that we are in.”<sup>7</sup> Further expansion on the topic was given by **Jennifer Wilhelm, Mayor Peduto** and **Councilman Lavelle**. The Mayor mentioned how many business districts and neighborhoods require a “ladder of opportunity to join the rest of Pittsburgh’s “new economy”.”<sup>8</sup> Councilman Lavelle’s main concern was how to develop areas such as the Heron Ave corridor for Startups and other small businesses.

**Josh Lucas, Founder of Crowdasaurus** mentioned how Startups need to engage

with their local businesses through networking and service usage outside of institutional investment. **Henry Pyatt, the City’s Small Business & Redevelopment Manager** praised the open-door policy of many of the Co-working spaces and the challenged those in attendance to stay engaged in their communities.



**Ian Rosenberger, CEO of Thread** mentioned that institutional investment from the URA of Pittsburgh is “one of the reasons we stayed [in Pittsburgh]” and mentioned that a mentorship program for aspiring entrepreneurs would be a great way for

<sup>7</sup> (City of Pittsburgh 2014)

<sup>8</sup> (City of Pittsburgh 2014)

the community to give back. Along the same line of thinking **Joe Vennare Co-founder of Pittsburgh** mentioned the need for a single location for new companies to go to for information on resources, something that while provided by the URA of Pittsburgh through [LaunchPGH](#)<sup>9</sup>, is not yet common knowledge. “We need a community facing side for Pittsburghers to pull and leverage from”, concluded Vennare.<sup>10</sup>

**Luke Skurman, CEO of Niche.com Inc**, spoke of [TechTown](#),<sup>11</sup> a large Co-working Space located in Detroit which functions as “a Beauty Shoppe on steroids”. TechTown is a space where it is “easy to start a business” and serves as the “one shining example” for the Startup community of Detroit, something Skurman feels is currently lacking in Pittsburgh.<sup>12</sup>

- b. Question 2: How can we encourage inclusion and diversity in Pittsburgh’s startup community?

**Matthew Stanton** and **Kit Mueller** both spoke to the value in having a hub for companies to start out, “it allows us to work with other companies that might be ahead of us in some areas to get ourselves to get to the end goal of becoming a profitable company faster.” **Kit Mueller** spoke about how that there isn’t enough room for companies in Co-working Spaces that need to grow into their second stage of growth.

**Jonathan Diven, CEO of Atmosferiq** spoke to the need to address the talent pipeline to new businesses in Pittsburgh. **Rick Cancelliere, CEO of Treatspace** said it is “difficult to pull in a diverse team,” and suggested that “the efforts to do so should be applauded”. Many in attendance agreed that it is too difficult to retain international students because of the difficulty in obtaining visas, and asked for help in those areas.

**Terrina Gogue of the Carey Group** brought up the IBM 6 Year high school model<sup>13</sup>, and suggested a partnership “with the public schools around Pittsburgh” to bring a “diverse voice to your [companies]”. **Douglas Michael Hiling II President of Phizzbo** spoke about his own personal experience with his company and the invaluable experience of having interns from the University of Pittsburgh’s MBA program.



The focus on education concluded with the **Mayor’s** remarks about a summer initiative from the Mayor’s Office to provide mentors for children and students to learn about different pathways and opportunities in the City of Pittsburgh.

*This isn’t the end of the conversation.  
Everything you are talking about here  
and in the other three roundtables will  
begin to merge together.*

– William Peduto, Mayor – City of  
Pittsburgh

<sup>9</sup> (URA of Pittsburgh 2014)

<sup>10</sup> (City of Pittsburgh 2014)

<sup>11</sup> (TechTown n.d.)

<sup>12</sup> (City of Pittsburgh 2014)

<sup>13</sup> (Fritz 2014)

- c. Question 3: How can we ensure re that Pittsburgh can be competitive in this sector regionally, nationally and internationally?
  - i. There were three main takeaways from the third discussion question.
    1. Pushing a strong narrative about the region’s growing and thriving new economy through national press and advertising.
    2. Creating more local sources of funding for Startups, including capital and Angel Investors as well as City directed funding.
    3. Lobbying for updates to state laws, including expanding the Keystone Innovation Zone and making it easier to obtain work visas for recently graduated international students.

## 6. Next Steps

One of the biggest needs for the **City of Pittsburgh** going forward that was brought up in nearly every one of the **Innovation Roundtables** was for a national campaign to highlight Pittsburgh has a hub for innovation and entrepreneurship. This was primarily identified in both the **Startup & Entrepreneur** and **Co-working & Accelerator Roundtables**. Highlighting Pittsburgh’s unique businesses and opportunities through both national media as well as advertising is a practical way to attract investment and business.



*It should be as easy to start a company as it is to make a movie.*  
-Ian Rosenberger, CEO and Founder of Thread

As part of the **Department of Innovation and Performance’s** ongoing dialogue with the Startup community they can help promote the enhancement of the sense of community among Startups. This could also be paired with a mentor program for city youth as part of an initiative from the Mayor’s office. The City of Pittsburgh also should include making it easier for companies to retain talent from local universities as a key component of the [Welcoming Pittsburgh](#) initiative.<sup>14</sup>

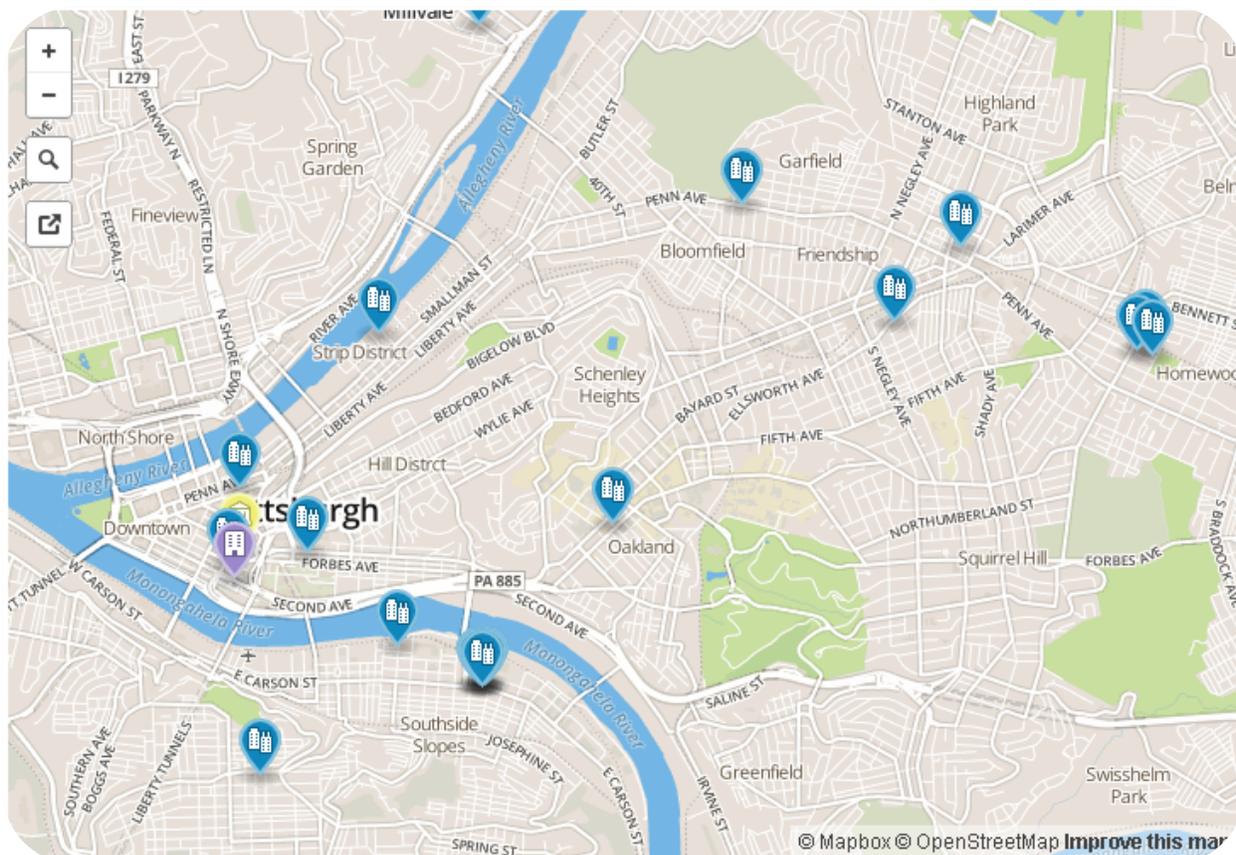
Many of the Entrepreneurs in attendance mentioned how difficult it is to find local sources of capital for new businesses. **Henry Pyatt** mentioned that the **URA of Pittsburgh’s** new **Business Development Executive, Eric White** was brought to the City for this expressed purpose. Going forward, it is important that the City maintain a business friendly atmosphere for new companies, not only in resources, but communicating and highlighting those resources so they are easier to find. This push to attract more capital investment in the City is a major part of the advertising and branding goals of the roundtable as well.

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<sup>14</sup> (McNulty, Mayor William Peduto launches Welcoming Pittsburgh Initiative 2014)

**Luke Skurman**, and others in attendance were very supportive of the City getting behind a larger hub of startup development and space. Therefore, a long-term goal for the City would be looking into supporting a kind of TechTown model similar to Detroit<sup>15</sup> and other cities. To this end, roundtable moderator **Kit Mueller** has already begun laying the foundation to create a 100,000 square-foot hub in Larimer called “The Forge”.<sup>16</sup> It is important that this space work to boost the Co-working & Accelerator spaces in the City and not depose them.

Fig 6.1 Startup & Entrepreneur Map



Most importantly, it is essential that the City of Pittsburgh and the Startup community remain engaged as partners going forward. Without continuous dialogue the City cannot ensure the environment becomes and remains friendly for new businesses.

If you have any questions, comments, concerns, or ideas for this Summary Report please contact the Department of Innovation & Performance by phone at (412) 255-2152, [online form](#), [email](#), or our twitter handle; [@PghIP](#).

<sup>15</sup> (TechTown n.d.)

<sup>16</sup> (Spencer 2013)

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