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Grand Rapids SmartZone LDFA, Spartan Innovations and Start Garden Report on Banner Year for City's Tech Hub

The Partnering Organizations Operated Incubation Spaces, Supported Over 100 companies and Sponsored both In- and Out-of-State Events

Over the last year, the [Grand Rapids SmartZone LDFA](#), the city's hub for tech startup support, has empower the city's high-tech, high-growth community through its partnership with Spartan Innovations, Start Garden, accelerators and events.

2023 highlights for the Grand Rapids SmartZone include:

Incubator Spaces: Spartan Innovations and Start Garden have partnered with Grand Rapids SmartZone to operate two incubators focused on accelerating and serving the high-tech, high-growth startup ecosystem: The Bridge and 40 Pearl. A total of 33 tenants reside in the two incubator spaces.

Resources Provided: Last year, Spartan Innovations and Start Garden served 132 unique companies, with 57% of those companies owned by underrepresented founders. In total, these companies raised over \$10 million.

Accelerators: Grand Rapids SmartZone partners with Conquer Accelerator and Gateway Grand Rapids (Business Accelerator Fund) to support eager entrepreneurs. Conquer Accelerator supported five companies in 2023, including pairing each with college interns. Gateway Grand Rapids awarded \$98,000 in funding to 15 companies, which were used to sponsor market research studies, legal costs, logo design, market testing and more.

In-State Event Sponsorship: Focused on building connections and awareness for the city's tech and startup community, Tech Week Grand Rapids attracted over 13,000 attendees across six days of programs and 40 events. The Grand Rapids SmartZone sponsored the Tech Hub, which hosted six programs throughout the week.

Out-of-State Event Support: Five companies were sponsored by the Grand Rapids SmartZone to attend South by Southwest (SXSW) in Austin, Texas through Midwest House. The companies were selected through The Start Garden 100 and Conquer Accelerator. By sponsoring these companies and attending the SXSW, the Grand Rapids SmartZone was able to represent the state and help position it as a tech leader.

“Over the last year, the Grand Rapids SmartZone and its partners have helped elevate and support the city’s high-tech, high-growth startup community,” said Jono Klooster, Interim Director of Economic Development for the City of Grand Rapids. “Collaboration is key, and our work with all our partners is positioning Grand Rapids as a hub for all things tech.”

To learn more about the Grand Rapids SmartZone and its partners, visit <https://growgr.grandrapidsmi.gov/smartzone>.

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About the Grand Rapids SmartZone Local Development Finance Authority (LDFA)

The SmartZone Local Development Finance Authority (LDFA) supports high-technology entrepreneurs and businesses. The SmartZone captures increased property tax dollars and reinvests that money back into the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Grand Rapids to provide incubator spaces and connections to support services to advance entrepreneurship and innovation. www.GrowGR.org.

About Michigan State University Research Foundation

The Michigan State University Research Foundation (MSU Research Foundation) was established in 1973 as an independent nonprofit committed to the commercialization of cutting-edge technologies invented by MSU faculty, staff, and students. Today, the MSU Research Foundation is focused on enhancing research, encouraging innovation and entrepreneurship, and facilitating economic growth at MSU and across the state through its subsidiary organizations—Spartan Innovations, Red Cedar Ventures, and Michigan Rise—and select real estate holdings. More information on the organization’s notable achievements, services, leadership, and history are available at www.msufoundation.org.

About Start Garden

Start Garden is an entrepreneurial ecosystem builder based in Grand Rapids, MI. Since 2012, it has launched more than 800 aspiring entrepreneurs through innovative programs like the monthly 5x5 Night pitch competition and the annual Start Garden 100. Covered in The Atlantic and Forbes for its innovative approach to ensuring any aspiring entrepreneur from any neighborhood has the same opportunity, Start Garden places access to real resources as the cornerstone of the ecosystem. At the highest levels of financial support for the ecosystem are the DeVos Family Foundations, WK Kellogg Foundation, Grand Rapids Community Foundation, Meijer DEI Initiatives and The Grand Rapids SmartZone, along with myriad other corporate sponsors and philanthropists. <https://startgarden.com>.

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