

For Immediate Release

Monday, October 9, 2017

Media Contact:

Elaine Sopchak, Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development
802-505-1795, Elaine.Sopchak@vermont.gov

Rebecca Kelley, Office of the Governor
802-828-6403, Rebecca.Kelley@vermont.gov

**FIRST ANNUAL INNOVATION SPACES CONFERENCE TO PROVIDE EXPERTISE, SUPPORT
FOR VERMONT ENTREPRENEURS**

Montpelier, Vt. – Governor Phil Scott today announced the first annual *Innovation Spaces Conference*, focused on creating a community among founders, users, and supporters of innovation spaces in Vermont. The free conference, which will be held on Thursday, October 26, is designed to support the success of a new kind of business model that is spreading throughout the country and has a vibrant, growing presence in Vermont.

Innovation spaces – the collective term for a communal and efficient shared workplace that includes co-working and maker spaces, incubators and accelerators – are becoming more prevalent in Vermont, as entrepreneurs leverage them for their low cost, collaborative atmosphere, and specialized equipment.

These organizations are breeding grounds for companies that start small, often with one employee, but have potential to scale up as their ideas and prototypes take shape. The collaborative nature of innovation spaces allows entrepreneurs to share their expertise to each other's benefit.

"Innovation spaces are an important way for Vermont to encourage business growth from within as we work to grow our economy and create more opportunities for Vermonters," said Gov. Scott. "This is an economic development tool my Administration is committed to leveraging, and I'm excited to see what ideas come out of this conference."

The Agency of Commerce and Community Development is hosting the conference, which stems from an idea promoted during the 2016 legislative session by Rep. Kevin Christie (D, Windsor 4-2). "It's important to foster microbusiness development in Vermont," says Rep. Christie. "These organizations provide a safe space for innovation, trial and error, and product development that's not always readily available to the small, start-up entrepreneur."

The conference is the first in a series of events focused on economic development that the Agency plans to produce. Agency Secretary Mike Schirling says more events in the coming months around the state will focus on topics essential to the economic growth of Vermont. "We plan to produce quarterly events throughout the state on topics that are relevant to our businesses," stated Schirling, adding, "We want

to connect with entrepreneurs, communities, and businesses to bring them new ideas and help them grow where they are.”

The Innovation Spaces Conference is co-sponsored by the Vermont Center for Emerging Technologies (VCET). VCET president Dave Bradbury will moderate the discussion. “With the number of small and one-person businesses on the rise in Vermont, it’s important to provide resources for local entrepreneurs to test out their business concepts and assist them in getting their businesses to the next level,” said Bradbury.

The conference is the first of its kind in Vermont, and will appeal to owners, users, and supporters of innovation spaces, as well as community members considering opening a space in their town. Sessions will focus on starting and funding spaces, and maintaining momentum through best practices and value-added services. Panelists include experienced professionals from Vermont-based innovation spaces who will share their challenges and success stories. The conference will end with an optional tour of Rutland’s new maker space, The MINT.

WHEN: Thursday, October 26, 2017, 9 a.m. – 12 p.m.

WHERE: Castleton University Campus Center ([directions](#))

Program schedule:

9-10 a.m. Starting an Innovation Space

Panelists: Dave Evans, former owner of CoWorking Plus
Samantha Sheehan, Valley.Works of Waitsfield
Doug Webster, Champlain Maker Faire, MakrWorks, Burlington Generator founding Board Member

10:15-11 a.m. Financing Innovation Spaces

Panelists: Ted Brady, Deputy Secretary, Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development
Travis Hellstrom, The Engine Room, White River Junction innovation space
Michael Metz, Board Member, The Generator of Burlington

11:15-12 p.m. Maintaining Momentum

Panelists: Dimitri Gardner, The Lightning Jar co-working space of Bennington
Michael Metz, Board Member, The Generator of Burlington
Sam Roach-Gerber, Director of Innovation, VCET of Burlington/Middlebury

12 p.m. Tour of The MINT (optional)

The Innovation Spaces Conference is a ThinkVermont event sponsored by the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development, Vermont Center for Emerging Technologies, Paul Frank & Collins, Champlain Maker Faire, The Generator of Burlington, Rutland Economic Development Corporation, The MINT, and Castleton University.

For more information, visit https://www.facebook.com/events/1912505575662980/?active_tab=about.

To register, visit <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/first-annual-innovation-spaces-conference-tickets-38405429674>.

About ACCD

The mission of the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD) is to help Vermonters improve their quality of life and build strong communities. ACCD is comprised of four departments: The Department of Economic Development (DED); the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD); the Department of Administration which includes the Office of the Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) and the Division of the Vermont Center for Geographic Information (VCGI); and the Department of Tourism and Marketing (VDTM), which also includes Vermont Life Magazine. The Agency reports annually to the Legislature on activities and outcomes.

###