Introduction
In places like Silicon Valley and in the emerging North Loop of Minneapolis, there are many opportunities for technologists and entrepreneurs to network – at formal events like industry association meetings and at technical seminars or, less formally, over cocktails at the local watering hole happy hour. We know that when people get together, they share ideas, find common interests, and cook up business plans.

In rural places or even in suburban communities, these networking opportunities do not naturally emerge. In fact, entrepreneurs and technologists in rural areas may feel isolated and unsupported and, as a result, move out of the community or give up on their technology advancement goals. To counter this trend, it seems advisable for community economic developers to create and promote networking opportunities so as to better connect these job creators, knowledge workers and innovators.

Here are some examples that might work in your community...

- **Social media breakfasts** are events that combine a bit of education and lots of networking around business use of social media strategies. The concept is simple – a sponsoring business/speaker from a tech consulting firm or a local firm with a positive message on technology, excellent and plentiful coffee and food and an audience interested in technology applications.

  Social media breakfasts, or SMBs, are a rapidly growing phenomenon. By searching online, you can find social media breakfasts in many Minnesota communities, including the Twin Cities, Duluth, and a hotbed of SMB activity in southwest Minnesota with organized efforts in Redwood Falls, Hutchinson, Willmar, Lakefield and Pipestone. Some communities, especially those trying to get a younger technology crowd, might want to meet for happy hour events rather than breakfast! Here are some examples of breakfast events.

  - [www.socialmediabreakfast.com/](http://www.socialmediabreakfast.com/)

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1 Blandin Foundation is proving this information as a courtesy and does not endorse any of the technology processes, products or vendors provided here.
• **Hackfests or Hackathons** are events where technologists and collaborators gather to share and gain information and skills. Hackfests last multiple hours to multiple days. Teams of coding experts, supported by graphic designers, writers and others, work to create technology solutions, sometimes for prizes, always for community benefit. Hackfests serve to connect technologists to each other and to potential contract work, employment and entrepreneurial opportunities.


• **Co-Working Centers** are places where technologists and entrepreneurs can gather in a location with bandwidth, equipment, working space and networking opportunities. Co-working centers support entrepreneurs and people who telework with flexible and affordable rents, offering a variety of spaces to include quiet areas, collaborative areas with couches and conference rooms.

  - **Twin Cities**
    - [www.cocomsp.com](http://www.cocomsp.com)
    - [http://workaroundtc.com/](http://workaroundtc.com/)
    - [http://joulemn.com/](http://joulemn.com/)
  - **Grand Rapids**
    - [http://commonspacegr.com/](http://commonspacegr.com/)
  - **Rochester**
    - [http://cube.mn/](http://cube.mn/)
  - **Duluth**

• **Community Technology or Broadband Advisory Councils** may begin as ad hoc groups formed to study and provide recommendations to city councils, but they can also play an ongoing role as a networking group. The members may find opportunities to collaborate, with government partners or not, on a full range of activities from shared infrastructure development, shared facilities and/or workforce training. The City of Eagan has had a technology group for over ten years.

  Blandin Foundation has been facilitating and supporting cross-sector community leadership teams around broadband and economic development for many years, including through the Minnesota Intelligent Rural Communities and the Blandin Broadband Communities Program.

  - [http://broadband.blandinfoundation.org](http://broadband.blandinfoundation.org)