

**Gangplank Avondale: Growing Business and Creating a
Cool Community in the Southwest Valley**

Category: Economic Vitality

City of Avondale, Arizona
Charlie McClendon, City Manager

Innovation Award – Yes
Rapid Fire Session – Yes

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Background, Intent, Outcomes

In August 2011, the City of Avondale entered into a professional services agreement with Gangplank Collective (Gangplank) to manage a collaborative workspace for technology-focused small businesses, entrepreneurs and the curious. With doors officially open in March 2012, following remodeling of the City's former City Hall, Gangplank Avondale is already home to six West Valley businesses and entrepreneurs, three (3) of whom have committed to being Anchor tenants.

The core purpose of Gangplank is to provide infrastructure and resources for a community of creative companies with the end goals of connected community, successful, exportable products, job creation, talent retention, tax revenues and the attraction of new sectors to the region and state. Gangplank's in-kind services, such as the collaborative workspace, mentoring, training and project management, increase the likelihood companies will confidently operate autonomously and on a path to profitably.

Avondale is the third location for Gangplank in Arizona. The original and headquarters for Gangplank is in downtown Chandler, AZ and a second location is located in Tucson, AZ. Gangplank is also working to establish workspaces in Henrico County, Virginia and Sault St. Marie, Ontario, Canada.

Cost/Savings

With the help of federal Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant (EECBG) funding, the City was able to renovate its former City Hall to improve energy efficiency and breathe new life into the building. Federal funds covered the installation of efficient lighting, removal of single pane mid-20th century windows which were replaced with 1-inch insulated Low-E glass. The HVAC system was also replaced and upgraded to SEER 13 for vastly improved efficiency over what was previously in the building. Federal EECBG funding totaled almost \$148,000. The remodel of the interior to create the open workspace was funded with City general funds totaling just over \$48,000.

Through a professional services agreement, Gangplank provides services to the City in exchange for \$60,000 per year. The scope of the work performed by Gangplank allows the experts to conduct activities and events for small businesses and entrepreneurs rather than adding to City staffing levels.

Each year, Gangplank is to provide the following services on behalf of the City for small businesses/entrepreneurs and the community:

- Provide an open workspace for software, gaming, Web design companies and others to connect entrepreneurs with focused teams with a proven track record of executing to completion.

- Manage an open collaborative coworking forum available to companies and entrepreneurs.
- Work with Economic Development and Community Relations to brand Avondale as a premier innovation hub and to assist in recruiting new innovative companies.
- Host an open public weekly evening event that provides the ability for entrepreneurs and technology workforce to connect, share ideas and launch new ventures to recruit new technology ideas into the City of Avondale.
- Provide a monthly hour long educational series focusing on timely and relevant topics that are open to the public, free of charge to attendees to be held a minimum of 12 times per year.
- Over 50% of the space is to remain designated coworking/open.
- Provide assistance to Economic Development and Community Relations on social media issues and outreach using technology for the benefit of the City.
- Work with programs and committees within the city to provide Web advisement and social media services to highlight businesses, venues and opportunities to increase sales tax into the City.
- Provide service and programs free of charge to P-20 students that encourage real world, hands on learning and discussion with people in the industry about new paths for creative and technical fields. Classroom opportunities should also include basic code writing, Web development and basic game design. Public programs are to be held a minimum of 10 times per year.
- Work with local school districts to foster educational opportunities to further the 2020 workforce requirements. Host an annual Referendum for Education Summit to be held in each spring that includes West Valley School districts, community colleges, leading companies, Economic Development organizations and City government.
- Work with local non-profits to provide educational services and activities to their clients. Also work with local non-profits to identify technology needs and work towards solutions to those technology needs.
- Implements and host a minimum of one conference annually located in the City of Avondale focusing on timely and technology issues.

Innovative Characteristics

The Avondale City Council enthusiastically sought out a partnership with Gangplank understanding that the Gangplank concept and focus on technology and innovation is critical to attracting jobs, stimulating the local economy and revitalizing the city's historic core. The founders of Gangplank, Derek Neighbors and Jade Meskill, made the choice to keep their company in Arizona because of their love for the state. They believe in the power of our state and they created Gangplank to help grow the region's creative and technology companies to give others the choice to stay in their home state versus relocating to traditional hotbeds for technology companies and venture capitalist.

Gangplank helps entrepreneurs, startups, small businesses and freelancers within the region and across the state to achieve success by providing collaborative workspace, mentoring,

education, and connections to talent, funding sources and experienced entrepreneurs. From pre-revenue startups to growth companies, Gangplank understands what it takes to be profitable in today's rapidly changing economy and most importantly, it provides an innovative solution to the attraction and retention issues currently experienced by the technology industry in our region and Arizona.

Outcomes

As well as encouraging networking and openness, Gangplank promotes civic engagement, particularly on a local level. Gangplank considers itself a partner with Avondale in fostering community, growing business and educating citizens on the opportunities available through their local government. Since opening in March 2012, Gangplank has conducted weekly brownbag discussions on topics of interest to businesses and community members. Work is also occurring to establish a Gangplank Jr program focusing on music and electronics.

Results/Real World Practicality

Gangplank provides a positive environment for growth through the fellowship of established businesses as well as opportunities to connect with potential employers or talent. The collaborative workspace and tremendous network provide startups the ability to solve problems in real-time so they can keep moving forward and not fall behind the rapid pace of the modern business world. Networking with Anchors maximizes a small company or individual's ability to attract new clients. These qualities ensure startups are insulated from common issues arising from isolation, lack of support, and insufficient marketing networks.

Gangplank Avondale is helping the City define itself as the hub for technology-based companies in the West Valley and helping to spread the word that technology opportunities can be found west of Phoenix proper. The City of Avondale looks forward to watching Gangplank Avondale establish itself in the community and provide that solid footing for small businesses and entrepreneurs.

Presentation Style

The case study presentation will include a power point presentation that provides an overview of Gangplank and the City's relationship with Gangplank.

Ms. Sammi Curless will discuss the City's partnership with Gangplank and the importance revitalizing Avondale's historic core had in Gangplank's location decision.

Mr. Derek Neighbors will explain what make's Gangplank unique as a collaborative workspace and what value they see if creating the Avondale location. Mr. Neighbors and the team may lead attendees in an active exercise meant to stimulate creativity.