

Rural Makerspaces Can Generate Big Ideas

By Caroline Tremblay

Once considered the domain of urban tech hubs and university labs, makerspaces have quietly found fertile ground in rural communities. These collaborative spaces are reshaping how rural residents learn, create, and even launch businesses.

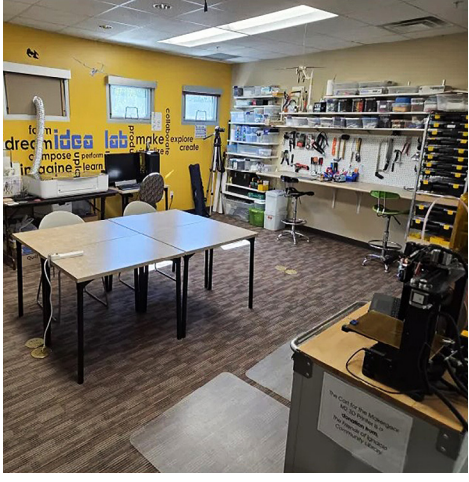
The idea itself isn't new. The first recorded makerspace dedicated to sharing resources and education with everyday people dates back to 1821 at the Mechanics Institute in Edinburgh, Scotland. Since then, universities, businesses, and community organizations have experimented with ways to make tools, knowledge, and skills more accessible.

In 2011, the concept entered United States public libraries when the Fayetteville Free Library in New York became the first to offer a makerspace. Libraries, always evolving to meet local needs, have proven natural incubators for the movement. Beyond borrowing books, today's rural patrons often check out hiking poles or fishing gear, attend after-school programs, or learn new skills in community workshops.

In Ignacio, Colorado, it all started with a modest experiment called "Maker Mondays." The gatherings brought neighbors together around simple craft projects, which drew the attention of Ron Schermacher, a new staff member with a lifelong love of tinkering. "I've had a shop since seventh grade, and as I like to joke, half my name is 'maker,'" he said. His research into makerspaces sparked an idea: Why not bring one to Ignacio? Soon, the Ignacio Community Library became the first in the region to offer a 3D printer to the public.

"As Ignacio is a small, ethnically diverse community, we wanted our citizens to have the same opportunities available to people in larger towns and cities," Schermacher said. Curiosity and opportunity fueled growth, and the library committed to a permanent makerspace known as the IDEA LAB.

The IDEA LAB serves both experimenters and entrepreneurs. Adults often test out equipment before investing in their own tools, while youth take on team projects. One recent highlight included makers ages nine to thirteen building a working pumped-storage hydro model. Their public



demonstration sparked serious conversations about how alternative energy might power the local community.

Schermacher also shared how one young man, a regular visitor in the makerspace's earliest days,

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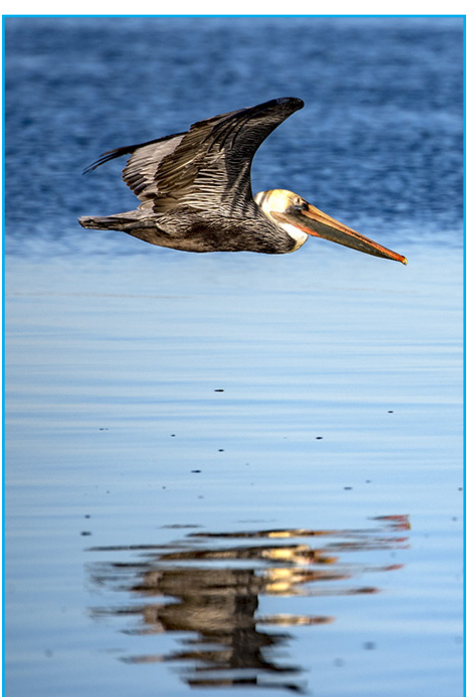
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Main Sponsor(s): US Small Business Administration

Contact: Irene Gonzalez, 208-334-1673, irene.gonzalez@sba.gov

Fee: Free; registration required

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Federal Contracting: Woman-Owned Small Business (WOSB) Certification Program Webinar Tuesday, November 18, 2025, 1:00 pm–3:00 pm CST Online

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Contact: Patrice Dozier, patrice.dozier@sba.gov

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SBA 101: Introduction to SBA Programs Webinar Monday, December 8, 2025, 9:00 am–10:00 am CST Online

Main Sponsor(s): US Small Business Administration, Rhode Island District Office

Contact: Brian Hopkins, 401-528-4575, brian.hopkins@sba.gov

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