



THE EXCHANGE: A DAFITC After-Hours Unconference

Hosted by The Eagle Institute in coordination with the Air University Innovation Accelerator (AUiX), the City of Montgomery, and regional partners in conjunction with DAFITC.

Purpose

The Eagle Institute proposes an after-hours, unconference-style gathering during DAFITC that convenes leaders and practitioners from government, industry, academia, civic organizations, and regional innovation ecosystems. The event will center on emerging opportunities in defense innovation, entrepreneurship, applied research, technology-enabled creativity, and talent development.

The Exchange will complement the formal conference with a more organic, relationship-driven environment where participants can connect across communities, share ideas, and identify practical pathways for collaboration. Desired outcomes include new partnerships, pilot projects, prototypes, student and faculty engagement, applied research opportunities, workforce initiatives, and technology-transition efforts.

Proposed Date / Time

Monday, August 24, 5:30-8:00 PM

Proposed Venue

The Eagle Institute, Montgomery, Alabama

Food and beverages would be available through Prevail, coordinated with Wade Preston. Live or curated local music may be incorporated to reinforce the informal, creative atmosphere.

Intended Audience/Partners

Invited participants would represent government, defense, industry, higher education, entrepreneurship, civic leadership, the arts, and regional innovation ecosystems. Potential partners and contributors include Stanford University, Troy University, Auburn University, Auburn University at Montgomery, Launch: Alabama / the I-85 Tech Corridor, Tech Alabama, TechBirmingham, Innovation Depot, AUiX, The Eagle Institute, the City of Montgomery, BESPIN, AI Playbook for Defense, the Montgomery Area Chamber of Commerce, SBOSS, MAP360, regional technology companies, economic-development organizations, and selected DAFITC and Air University guests.

Proposed Tracks

1. Innovation, Experimentation, and Applied Research

Focus: Identifying promising technologies and ideas, testing them through practical experimentation, and creating pathways to transition successful capabilities into defense-relevant and public-sector contexts.

2. Entrepreneurship, Ecosystem Building, and Talent Development

Focus: Strengthening founder pathways, regional technology corridors, workforce and talent pipelines, venture support, and connections among civic, academic, industry, and defense partners.

3. Creative Communities: Art, Data, and Technology

Focus: Bringing together artists, designers, technologists, data practitioners, and civic innovators to explore how creative methods can make complex information more understandable, reveal new perspectives, and inspire action. Potential topics include data visualization and storytelling, interactive installations, technology-enabled public art, creative placemaking, digital media, human-centered design, and collaborative projects that connect defense, civic, and community challenges with local creative talent.

Draft Agenda

5:30-6:00 PM | Arrival, Food, and Networking

Guests arrive, grab food and drinks, and connect informally.

6:00-6:10 PM | Welcome and Event Framing

Brief welcome from The Eagle Institute/AUiX and collaborating regional partners, followed by an overview of the DAFITC context, the purpose of the evening, and the desired outcomes.

6:10-6:20 PM | Lightning Introductions

Short introductions from selected government, academic, industry, civic, and innovation ecosystem partners.

6:20-7:15 PM | Ignite Talks and Unconference Breakout Tracks

A series of rapid, Ignite-style presentations will introduce ideas, projects, and provocations from across the three tracks. Participants will then self-select into facilitated breakout conversations to identify shared opportunities, barriers, available capabilities, and potential follow-on collaborations.

7:15-7:40 PM | Report-Outs and Opportunity Mapping

Each track will provide a concise report-out highlighting promising ideas, potential partnerships, and actionable next steps. A lightweight opportunity-mapping activity may be used to clarify what could happen next, who needs to be involved, and what may be lost if promising connections are not pursued.

7:40-8:00 PM | Open Networking and Follow-Up Connections

Informal networking, partner introductions, and identification of follow-on meetings or collaboration opportunities.