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## 5 Social Impact Startups to Watch in Cincinnati

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Teachers from St. Augustine School get the tools they need for their classroom from Crayons to Computers. Photo Courtesy St. Augustine School's Twitter.

By Courtney Gabrielson

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Things that the future has going for it: convenience, and lots of it. Consider how innovators have brought us Bumble and Overdrive and online banking. Lots of things get done with a snap. Often on one's couch.

Progress doesn't just make things easy, however. After all, there's another side to modern living that strives to be less focused on instant gratification: social enterprise. Its intent is to drive cultural change for the better, in the most basic sense.

These groups, known as social enterprise companies, flourish in Cincinnati, thanks in part to organizations like [Flywheel Social Enterprise Hub](#). It offers an accelerator ([Elevator](#)), free consulting services ([439 hours in 2019 alone](#)), events and other resources for area social enterprises — all so that these organizations can exist and make the community

stronger.

The 2010-born organization, which is housed in Union Hall, said that uniting with the local #StartupCincy community was integral for its continued growth.

"It was a game changer ... [all this] would not have been possible for us if we didn't have this place and Union Hall to call home. Our community has been huge. We feel legitimate," Flywheel Executive Director [Bill Tucker told Cincy Inno](#). "That's something I've been working towards for a long time."

Their mission has resonated so much with the larger community that this fall, Connetic Ventures, Miami University's Center for Social Entrepreneurship and Flywheel Social Enterprise Hub [announced a new partnership](#), one that looks to provide a new outlet for Great Cincinnati social impact startups to access capital.

These entities are only [scratching the surface of initiatives in the Queen City focused on](#) social enterprise. [Aviatra Accelerators](#), which covers a host of different programs geared towards all kinds of women entrepreneurs, [is consistently making headlines](#), adding new offerings and catering to new and different needs.

Sometimes, however, supply and demand is irrelevant for these kind of organizations. Many entrepreneurs consider having a sincere calling enough to catalyze their very own social impact startup.

Regardless of what inspired the initial leap, social enterprises matter in Cincinnati. And below, we've rounded up five that are worth keeping an eye on this holiday season and beyond.

## CENTER TABLE

On the surface, Center Table is a catering organization. Look a little closer, however, and you'll realize that the Florence, K.Y.-based business has more on its plate.

In fact, the goal of Center Table is to help women in recovery learn job skills for opportunities in the culinary industry. It developed a curriculum that works in tandem with Brighton Recovery Center's Phase I and Phase II programs and also boasts 34 hours of total classroom participation.

## CRAYONS TO COMPUTERS



Crayons to Computers. Courtesy the organization's Twitter.

**One in five** Greater Cincinnati-based children live in poverty. That often means they come to school without the tools they need to get through the day, like backpacks and writing utensils.

It's a startling reality, and this 1997-born entity looks to fix it by providing free school supplies across the region. So far, it's donated more than \$163 million worth of tools, "with no stopping in sight."

Donations and sponsored partnerships have driven CTC, which offers a "Teacher Free Store" (free school supplies for educators on certain days) and a Mobile Outreach Program (which brings supplies directly to schools).

## GRAINWELL



**Grainwell**

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A graduate of Aviatra Accelerators, Grainwell uses recycled wood — think materials scored [via dumpster dives or old buildings](#) — to craft unique products out of their Covington-based boutique. Run by three sisters, the shop has a wide line of products that are now sold in states like Alaska and California.

## GIVE BACK CINCINNATI



Courtesy photo.

Give Back Cincinnati's mission is rather straightforward: Every year, plan free, high-quality volunteer opportunities for participants. After each service project, the team will then engage in some sort of social experience afterward.

The 2000-born group is considered both the largest young professionals organization and the largest volunteer organization in the city — all without a paid staff or a physical office. Instead, volunteer members keep the nonprofit afloat.

Members are typically between 18-35, and opportunities range from "civic engagement" to "leadership." All that's required to participate is the expectation that volunteers show up ready to work hard.

## VILLEDGE



Image: Stacy Wegley

Villedge in action. Courtesy photo. Stacy Wegley (513)260-3225

Founded by college sweethearts Katie and Iloba Nzekwu, Villedge is a community that works with at risk teens. The goal is to help these kids better understand the importance of community, and balancing a healthy mind and body. Inspired by their own stories, filled with adversity they were able to overcome, the husband and wife duo created the organization, which they brought through Flywheel's accelerator program.

Villedge offers volunteer-led tutoring, coaching and mentoring, as well as resources and opportunities offered by partner organizations, local families, trauma-competent caregivers and other experts.

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Oct. 26: Data science meetup

Nov 16: SustainableCincy Demo Day

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