



2025 STORY

 **ChicoSTART**
START. GROW. THRIVE.

 **GrowTECH**
CAREERS CULTURE COMMUNITY



ACCELERATE
CALIFORNIA
INCLUSIVE INNOVATION HUBS



Accelerating Our Impact



Eva Shepherd-Nicoll
Executive Director

We support and enrich Northern California's Entrepreneurial Ecosystem and provide startups with the resources they need to succeed.

This past year has been one of remarkable growth, connection, and momentum for ChicoSTART – *the North State's entrepreneurial hub serving 20+ counties across Northern California*. Our mission remains clear: to remove barriers, build bridges, and deliver the resources, mentorship, and community infrastructure that help founders and small businesses start, grow, and thrive in one of the most rural, geographically expansive regions of the state.

In 2025, ChicoSTART deepened its commitment to inclusive innovation and regional resiliency through expanded programming, new partnerships, and statewide leadership as an Accelerate California Inclusive Innovation Hub and Technical Assistant Program (TAP) provider, while GrowTECH, BlueTech Valley and 1 Million Cups programs provide entrepreneurial resources and regional collaboration.

We continue to strengthen our role as a connector and catalyst – helping entrepreneurs access capital, talent, technical assistance, and a broader network of support. This shared success underscores a deeper truth: entrepreneurship is a key driver of community vitality and long-term economic strength.

Across the year, we witnessed the extraordinary resilience and creativity that define the entrepreneurs and communities of Northern California. Founders refined ideas within our coworking hub, students explored real-world innovation through Chico State, Cal Poly Humboldt, Fresno State, regional colleges, and small business owners leveraged our resources to overcome challenges and scale new opportunities.

As we look toward the coming year, this annual report reflects not just the milestones reached, but the stories, partnerships, and forward movement that define our region's innovation landscape. Together, we are building a future where every entrepreneur – has equitable access to the support needed to flourish.

Cheers,
Eva Shepherd-Nicoll
Executive Director



TOTAL FUNDING

\$3.5 MILLION

TOTAL FUNDS RAISED

Acquisitions, licensing agreements, and other funds.

\$38 MILLION

TOTAL INVESTMENT

Loans, grants and contracts.



14%

AG/AG TECH/
OUTDOOR TOURISM



37%

SERVICE



29%

TECH/AI/
ADVANCED MFG.



20%

ECOMMERCE

TOTAL CHICOSTART NORTH STATE IMPACT

8

Accelerate
California
Communities

75+

New
Businesses
Launched

245+ Jobs
Created

951+ Counseling
Hours

303+ Businesses
Served

1300+ Businesses Served Since 2016 · 600+ Total Jobs Created Since 2016

EMPOWERING FOUNDERS, FUELING INNOVATION

ChicoSTART's mission is to empower - entrepreneurs, startups and businesses with resources, training and community support needed to start, grow and thrive throughout Northern California.



Accelerate CA Inclusive Innovation Hub

ChicoSTART is honored to be one of only 13 designated Accelerate California Inclusive Innovation Hubs, representing 20+ counties across the North State. Our mission is to cultivate a regional entrepreneurial ecosystem that offers equitable access to resources—especially in rural and diverse communities—while expanding the impact of ChicoSTART throughout the region.



GROWTECH

An industry-led partnership fostering careers, culture, and community in the North State's entrepreneurial ecosystem. GrowTECH connects founders, businesses, and the community through events, mentorship, and regional collaboration.



1 Million Cups

A national program powered by the Kauffman Foundation, 1MC Chico provides a weekly forum for entrepreneurs to present their ideas, receive feedback, and connect with peers, mentors, and community supporters.



ChicoSTART NEXTGEN Initiative encourages founders aged 18+ to accelerate innovative ideas into reality, providing the essential tools and mentorship needed to START, GROW and THRIVE.

Total Cohorts 2023–2025



CHICOSTART EVENTS & PROGRAMS



Strategic & Innovative Workshops



Global Entrepreneurial Week—Chico



Accelerate Your Business Series



1 Million Cups Chico



GrowTECH



NEXTGEN Initiative



153+ Total Events



930+ Trainings/Workshops Attendees

GrowTECH FEST

Celebrating + Elevating the Entrepreneurial Spirit in the North State

GrowTECH FEST is the **ONLY Entrepreneurial Conference North of Sacramento**, offering a diverse lineup of speakers, investors, startup stories challenge, and industry expert sessions. Entrepreneurs, startups, small businesses and students gain essential tools, inspiration and connections to navigate the complexities of starting and growing a business, hearing firsthand from successful entrepreneurs in our region.

GrowTECH 2025 Startup Stories Winners



Ponderosa.ai



Attendees



Speakers



Sponsors



Students



Thank You Sponsors!





ACCELERATE —
— **CALIFORNIA**
INCLUSIVE INNOVATION HUBS

ACCELERATE CA INCLUSIVE INNOVATION HUB

ChicoSTART is honored to be one of only 13 designated Accelerate California Inclusive Innovation Hubs, **representing and serving 20+ counties** across the North State. Our Accelerate CA Hub offers diverse entrepreneurs the opportunity to develop and grow their innovative ideas by bridging the connection to local networks and communities and increasing access to critical advising and training services.

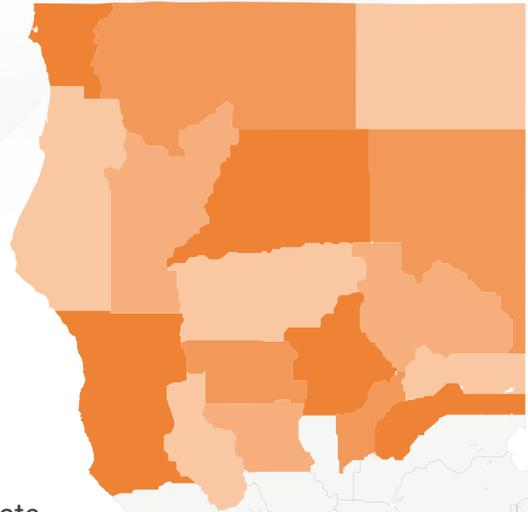
A Small Business Incubator Built On 5 Pillars

- Technical Assistance
- Resource Network
- Capital Access
- Subject Matter Experts
- Physical Space

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA COMMUNITIES ACCELERATED BY CHICOSTART



Through CA Accelerate, ChicoSTART supports and empowers each community by providing entrepreneurs, startups and small businesses the opportunity to develop and grow their innovative ideas through resources, programs, advising and training.



ChicoSTART IHub Designee Service Map

“With 97% of these counties being rural—our hub brings vital support, funding access, and statewide connections to historically underserved areas.”

ACCELERATE CALIFORNIA COMMUNITIES



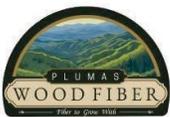
G.C.E.F.
Nurture | Enrich | Accel



CHICOSTART 2025 SUCCESS STORIES



A ChicoSTART California Accelerate Success Story describes startups who are solving a problem in a key sector, proving that by removing the barriers to access, they are making an impact in the growth of the North State entrepreneurial ecosystem.



Plumas Wood Fiber

Producing horticultural potting substrate from forest biomass.



Real Good Soil

Crafted from responsibly thinned forest biomass and living microbiology.



Solir Thermeshade

Solir is advancing window technology with Thermeshade—an innovative solar control system.



Red Line Safety

Building Technology that saves firefighter lives, improves incident command operations and protects communities.

Ponderosa.ai

Ponderosa.ai

Keeping wildfire small with AI-enabled suppression drone swarms.



Fusion NFC

Instantly share social media, website, or contact info with just a tap using a sleek, waterproof NFC keychain—no app needed.



The innovation grant has been so helpful, we were at a point where we had all this data and then ran into an issue with the actual material. R&D is very expensive and with this grant we were able to do things like pay for rent every month. We had high overhead and it really eased the pressure on moving forward with the product because we cannot sell what we don't have.

— Diana Eastman, Founder
Solir Thermeshade



Being able to start a real business with real money, real products, and real people inside a classroom was the best thing that ever happened to me. I genuinely do not know where I would be without this class or without Fusion NFC. It did not just teach me business. It gave me a future.

— Ivan Monreal, Founder
Fusion NFC



The Innovation Grant supported by ChicoSTART and funded by the CA Office of Small Business Advocates and IBank, has helped us buy equipment, hire interns and have a warehouse space here in Chico. Not only has it helped us make progress ourselves, but also to give back to the community and economy.

— Ryo Chijiwa, Founder
Ponderosa.Ai

CHICOSTART TEAM



Eva Shepherd-Nicoll
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Heather Ugie
BIZOPS & MARKETING
MANAGER



Cassidy Corboline
MARKETING &
SPECIAL PROJECTS



Nataly Chavez
PROGRAM COORDINATOR
& SPECIAL PROJECTS



Grant Rooney
GRANTS ANALYST

How can we help you **START, GROW** and **THRIVE?**



Scan to get in touch!



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THANK YOU PARTNERS



California's *local* bank



COMMUNITY PARTNERS



IHUB PARTNERS



SAVE
the
DATE
2026

STRATEGIC & INNOVATIVE WORKSHOP DAY
April 8, 2026

7TH ANNUAL GROWTECH FEST 2026
Oct. 8-9, 2026

GLOBAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP WEEK
Nov. 16-22, 2026

