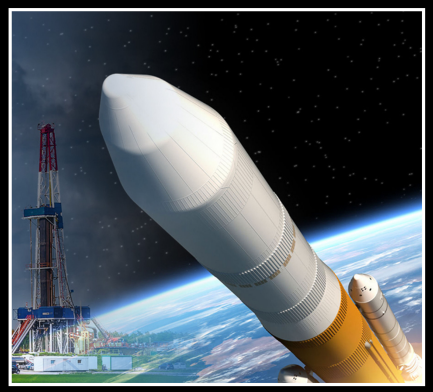
STATE AND LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AWARD

NASA Johnson Space Center, City of Brownsville, STARGATE (University of Texas Rio Grande Valley) "Rockets and Rigs Hack-a-Thon"



NASA has a long history of technology transfer and in 2015 it launched the Startup NASA program to increase the licenses sought by startups. This program allows Startups to license NASA technology for no application fee and no licensing fee for three years. NASA looks to seed new markets with NASA technology across industries, including the commercial space market. The team at the Johnson Space Center was looking for innovative communities that could connect startups in their region to NASA technology.

In August 2014, SpaceX selected a site near Brownsville Texas for their next launch facility. As part of the incentives to attract the commercial space company, Texas and EDA helped fund Dr. Jenet's STARGATE facility to continue the efforts of his programs to attract and grow the student workforce for this emerging commercial space economy. STARGATE was chartered to create startups that would impact the region and grow the space economy in Brownsville.

Rockets and Rigs was created to enable the creation of startups that would address the pain points of either the aerospace community or the energy industries rig community with technology from one industry in order to provide a commercial solution to be adopted by the other industry. Over a series of events beginning in February 2017, NASA identified 26 technologies that addressed the technical challenges voiced by the Rigs community. During this Rockets and Rigs event, the energy community reviewed the intellectual property presented by NASA and identified 14 technologies that had high potential to impact their industry. Encouraged by this response by the energy community, the Rockets and Rigs leadership with support of the City of Brownsville invited entrepreneurs, venture capitalist, representatives from both the aerospace and rigs community and students from the University of Texas, Rio Grande Valley to create companies that could be launched at the completion of the event.



The City of Brownsville brought the resources of the city to support this initiative. They have facilitated the attendance and support of the leadership in the community and have reached out to the business community for their engagement. The event ended with the participants self-selecting into six startups that would have a market in the energy industry. Three startups are currently in the process of being incorporated in the state and the NASA centers have already begun the process to initiate the startup licenses.



Through the City of Brownsville's participation, additional initiatives have been launched to enable the success of the companies being formed by Rockets and Rigs. The new acceleration facility, Expanding Frontiers, would not have been possible without their leadership. The success of the collaboration contributed to the launching of NewSpace Brownsville.

