

# Milwaukee Institute shares its vision for a cyber future

By Kathleen Gallagher of the Journal Sentinel  
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Milwaukee has an abundance of physical space, but not enough shared cyberspace to compete with tech-oriented areas such as California, China, Germany, Ireland and Singapore, according to organizers of a proposed data center in the Menomonee Valley.

The nonprofit Milwaukee Institute is spearheading a strategy for a regional high-performance computing infrastructure for academia, government and industry dubbed the MGrid Initiative.

"The Milwaukee region is 39th in population, but we have fewer engineers and scientists per capita than similarly sized regions and we're 64th in listings for high-tech economy indicators," said Jay Bayne, executive director of the Milwaukee Institute, at a meeting Thursday of the Wisconsin Innovation Network.

The way to keep the state's abundance of university-trained engineers and scientists is to create more jobs for them. Critical to that, Bayne said, is the development of a cyber infrastructure. The Milwaukee Institute intends to build it with:

- A 150,000-square-foot, energy-efficient server farm on Canal St. near the We Energies power plant is being developed by Source IT Energy LLC, a for-profit Boston firm. Source IT will sell or lease condos in the Menomonee Valley Data Center, where tenants can take advantage of the efficiencies from eliminating transmission losses and using steam instead of electric power for chillers, said Herb Zien, the company's Milwaukee-based senior vice president and chief development officer.

Source IT has a purchase option on 9 acres near W. Canal and N. 6th streets, Zien said.

- The tools for a regional broadband network are here, starting with the miles of unused fiber optic cable in what Bayne called one of the most "fiber-rich communities in the U.S."
- The Milwaukee Institute is working to develop high-performance computing systems and services, and bring together scientific, commercial and governmental institutions from around the region to share them, Bayne said.

"Incremental costs dive when resources are shared," he said.

Among other potential tenants, Source IT has been talking with Web hosting companies outside the region that are interested in taking advantage of the center's lower costs and setting up shop there, Zien said.

"We think we're about half way to having the critical mass to get the building under way," Zien said.