

Vision for Building an Equitable Innovation Community

Cortex' mission is to build and support a community of innovators and entrepreneurs that will establish the St. Louis region as a globally recognized technology hub. We believe that the best innovation happens when a diversity of communities and cultures have the opportunity and support necessary to contribute to and shape a future that makes St. Louis and our world a better place for all. We believe that when individuals and organizations intentionally work together to create access to innovation and entrepreneurship opportunities for all, the region will flourish and become a model for others to emulate.

We recognize that not everyone in St. Louis has been able to access, or has felt comfortable in accessing, the opportunities and resources that the Cortex Innovation Community provides; whether it be participating in the physical development of the district, providing district support services, starting a new company, or working for a new entrepreneurial venture.

Entrepreneurship is an avenue to empowerment that enables people to find fulfillment in their work, contribute creative solutions to important problems, and build personal and familial wealth. The Cortex Innovation Community seeks to empower aspiring entrepreneurs by providing access to the capital, networks, training and the space necessary to start and grow a company, particularly in a high-growth, high-tech field. When individuals are supported in the creation of a new business venture, the entire region benefits from not only an empowered and engaged community member but from the commercialization of her new product, the development of new jobs, and the generation of new tax dollars. When individuals cannot access entrepreneurial support mechanisms, or are denied equitable treatment when they seek to access them, the individual, our innovation community, and the region as a whole loses.

Cortex is committed to fostering an innovation community in which the benefits of new company formation, capital investment, job creation and wealth generation extend to all. We will continue to work closely with our District innovation centers, founding partners and other entrepreneur support organizations across the region to create and strengthen that community. We recognize that we are part of a larger movement for inclusive economic transformation of the St. Louis region.

As part of our commitment to build an equitable regional innovation community, Cortex is engaged in the following efforts:

- Incorporating equity lenses - with a particular focus on race/ethnicity and gender equity and including those reflecting foreign-born/immigrant, ability, cultural background,

sexuality, and socioeconomic status/class - into Cortex decision-making, policies, programs, and partnerships

- Collaborating with our institutional partners and innovation centers to produce and facilitate programs focused on creating equity in entrepreneurship
- Regularly auditing Cortex, its programs, and their impact on and commitment to social equity, with analysis categories that include race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and ability
- Developing and utilizing a mechanism for collecting and disaggregating demographic, economic, and attitudinal data of Cortex companies and employees
- Working with developers and contractors on district construction projects to meet and exceed goals for contracting with minority and women-owned businesses and deploying a diverse workforce, as well as participating in ongoing city and regional discussions related to construction enterprise and workforce goals
- Building a more inclusive organization by continuing to diversify Cortex staff, leadership, and Board, by race, gender, age, and profession
- Offering ongoing training programs in diversity, inclusion, and equity for Cortex staff, Inclusion Committee members, and District leadership
- Creation of a diverse Cortex Board Inclusion Committee made up of community partners, Board members, and innovation center partners, to advise the Board on programs and policies around diversity, inclusion, and equity
- With staff and Inclusion Committee members, closely examining the Ferguson Commission Report and its calls to action to identify those which Cortex has a role in moving forward, and developing actionable strategies for implementation

The Inclusion Committee is charged with an ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness of current efforts and the creation of new efforts and initiatives that will serve to build and sustain an equitable Cortex Innovation Community. Cortex recognizes that it is not only *what we do*, but *how we do it*. We are committed to and value truthfulness, transparency, authenticity, and respectfulness in the execution of our mission.