# St Louis Social Innovation District

***A Shared Approach to Measurably Advancing the Capacity of the Region's Social Sector.***

*St Louis has an abundance of passion even as we suffer from a lack of precision. A stronger and more precise social sector must be built in order to achieve important regional goals. This includes assuring program quality, organizational excellence, and partnerships that can manage needed change to produce population outcomes The region's goals and problems are in the commons – owned by no one agency, constituency or funder. So too must be the solutions. The St Louis Social Innovation District is a literal public commons devoted to strengthening our collective problem solving muscle and to achieving outcomes that can only be realized through precise and aligned action.*

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St Louis lacks comprehensive and well-coordinated efforts to ensure quality social programming, to build non-profit organizational capacity, and to support partnership performance. The result is great variability in the quality of supports and programming received by children and families. Despite pockets of excellence, the region's non-profit institutions often struggle to measurably deliver on their mission. The region has too many ineffective partnerships that cannot manage needed change to produce population-level outcomes. Such is the state of the region's capacity despite an increased call for accountability and demands for a stronger and less fragmented response to pressing social concerns.

St Louis has an abundance of *passion* even as we suffer from a lack of *precision*.

Youth development and education, workforce preparedness, racial inequity – all require quality programming, strong organizations, and effective community partnerships to achieve desired outcomes. Regardless of the social issue or community initiative these three abilities are required to achieve results. The abilities required cannot be built in isolation. Program quality cannot be addressed without simultaneously improving organizational capacity. Strong organizations cannot achieve bold outcomes without working together and with other community sectors through effective partnerships.

The St Louis Social Innovation District is being created to build and sustain the muscles required to address our regional challenges. Three Anchors form the footprint of the District. The Anchors match the three abilities the region requires to achieve outcomes and are the National Center for Program Innovation & Replication, the Partnership for Non-Profit Excellence, and the Center for Partnership Performance.

An additional partnership will co-locate in the District devoted to positive youth development. From birth to young adulthood, covering the range of developmental milestones, and focused on a broad definition of success - young adults fully prepared for work, life, and learning – these agencies intend to change how they work together by leveraging the power of co-location. This is not the co-location of services but of the agencies' leadership and decision making so that *collaboration becomes how they do business* - not something done in addition to regular duties or something done outside of the normal workday. This partnership will also focus on program quality using a peer-to-peer training and direct observation methodology to improve objective measures of program quality at the point of service. The goal is to increase overall measures of youth program quality for the region.

Core to the District's philosophy is a belief that St Louis has key strengths on which we can build – no starting from scratch; many institutions have key parts of the puzzle that when assembled can achieve a better result – we need strong partners that stay strong even as they grow through collaboration; and that engagement is key – nothing for the social sector without the sector's guidance with an emphasis on mutual support and creating accountable mechanisms for those who wish to invest in building the sector's capacity.

**Why a physical district devoted to social innovation? Co-location as a strategy.**

Cortex. West County Mall. The Public Media Commons. Grand Center. The power of co-location is already at work for many St Louis sectors and institutions. Business has learned the power of incubators for growing new and innovative companies – and for connecting to our regional strengths such as plant and biomedical sciences. Retail has used co-location to increase foot traffic at malls and the hospitality sector has created dining destinations like South Grand. Our arts and culture sector established Grand Center and more recently media outlets with a shared mission created the Public Media Commons. Co-location strategies have been used to successfully advance a variety of outcomes in St Louis.

A dedicated district can also be a powerful strategy to advance outcomes in the social sector.

At the simplest level being near each other allows for incidental communication, relationship building, and lowers the response cost for working in partnership. The District can reduce the time, effort, and money it takes for non-profit staff to pursue needed professional development and to identify and work with partners. The District will establish the presumptive social expectation that collaboration is how we do business.

Similar to Cortex, the District allows St Louis to connect to regional strengths. For example, local universities and higher education have particular strengths that should be leveraged to greater regional benefit including the Brown School (the Brown School of Social Work at Washington University in St. Louis is ranked as tied for #1 in the country by U.S. News & World Report), St Louis University (top ranked for public health), and the University of Missouri, St Louis (top ranked in criminal justice).

Similarly, nationally recognized St Louis based non-profits such as Parents as Teachers and Wyman provide essential programming across the country to thousands of children and families but are often less well known in their own home town. The District can effectively leverage outside resources such as the World Health Organization's Collaborating Centre for Community Health and Development by giving them a permanent point of connection and a physical presence in the St Louis region.

But being near each other is not enough. Programming for what happens in the District is equally important. How can innovation, collaboration, and efficiency be fostered? The District is organized into three categories of actors and institutions for this purpose. *Permanent Anchors*, *Performance Partnerships*, and *Communities of Practice* make up the footprint of the District. Anchors maintain attention on building capacity across the social sector –sharpening the saw. Performance partnerships are action oriented, co-located, multi-disciplinary teams bound in the pursuit of shared outcomes – collective impact. Communities of practice are a source of important innovations – fuel for the fire.

Each of these is a passion point. Donors, leaders, and volunteers are legitimately motivated by different aspect of work in the social sector. Some care deeply about specific neighborhoods, populations, or age groups. Others are passionate about a strategy such as mentoring or youth engagement. Yet others want to see more effective involvement by individual sectors such as business engagement or governmental relations. The structural design of the District is intended to align with and capture these passion points.

**What is a Social Innovation District?**

A Social Innovation District is an organization that accelerates and systematizes the creation of successful community responses to pressing social concerns by providing a comprehensive and integrated range of supports including: quality standards and assessments, incubator space, operational support services, skills development, process and facilitation support, research and evaluation services, clustering or co-location, and networking opportunities.

By providing a 'one-stop-shop' and reducing overheads by sharing costs, Social Innovation Districts significantly improve the survival, quality, and outcomes of social improvement initiatives. Successful Social Innovation Districts devise new or improved social policies, programs, and practices; promote sustainable and high capacity non-profit organizations; and foster community partnerships that can systematically improve population-level outcomes across issues and over time.

**Why three Anchors? The levels of social change and action.**

Passion points are critical but equally so is precision. Science and practice has routinely demonstrated that precision is required at three levels. Programs (a term used broadly here to include all discreet interventions whether they are actually programs, policies, or practices), agencies, and partnerships are all necessary and none is sufficient. Further, they interact in a multi-level ecology of solutions that must be intentionally managed together.

St Louis needs precision and innovation at each of these levels and they are necessarily nested. Each level has its own practice and research traditions. Education, treatment, individual and small group psychology, and social work undergird program development and implementation. Management, organizational psychology, and administration buttress organizational learning and practice. Public policy, public health, public administration, community psychology and community development all attend to the population level and to multi-sector partnerships.

The three Anchor's purposes, actions, and outcomes are summarized in Table 1 on the next page.

| | Program, Policy, Practice | Organizations | Partnerships & Alliances |
|---|---|---|---|
| Who | Front line program staff, program managers | Executive leadership teams, leadership pipeline | Community and system leaders |
| What: Skills | Innovation, Implementation | Management and Leadership skills | Core Competencies, Backbone Functions |
| What: Process | Innovation Cycle, Supporting Replication | Organizational Improvement | Essential Processes |
| Home Within the Social Innovation District | National Center for Program Innovation & Replication | Partnership for Non-Profit Excellence | Center for Partnership Performance |
| Key Outcomes | *Innovation & Quality*<br>• # programs in pipeline<br>• # of evidence-based programs and practices developed<br>• # of replicated programs<br>• # of sites and individuals served<br>• % of region with access to innovations | *Effective Implementation*<br>• # of agencies measuring quality<br>• Individual organizational measures of quality<br>• Average regional quality score | *Enabling Contexts; Change Management*<br>• CPQI (continuous process quality improvement scores)<br>• Community and systems change (new or improved polices, programs & practices)<br>• Change in population-level indicators |
| Key Questions | What model for the stages of innovation can be agreed upon and adopted regionally?<br><br>What is the current level of organizational capacity to follow such a model in the region?<br><br>How do current assets and supports align with documented needs?<br><br>What elements of business incubation are applicable to promoting social innovations? | What measures of organizational quality can be universally agreed upon and implemented?<br><br>What is the current level of organizational quality for non-profits in the St. Louis region?<br><br>How do current assets and supports align with documented needs?<br><br>What national models for improving quality can we learn from and adapt to fit our local landscape? | What partnership processes have an evidence base and predict outcomes?<br><br>What competencies enable leaders to execute known processes and achieve results?<br><br>What is the current level of partnership performance in the St Louis Region?<br><br>What national models for improving partnership and coalition capacity can we learn from and adapt to fit our local landscape? |

**Why organize the District around *anchors*, *performance partnerships*, and *communities of practice*? Leveraging the power of the District to achieve multiple outcomes.**

*Anchor*

An Anchor's outcome is capacity at a specific level and for a specific group of actors. This level of work transcends issues, initiatives, and communities and focusses on building our collective problem solving muscle. The Anchors are permanent and serve as the bridge to capacity building partners such as area universities, management service organizations, and national or international agencies. Each Anchor has multiple community partners that implement needed training, consultation, and coaching. The Anchors use a collective impact approach to measurably improve capacity for the St Louis region.

*Performance Partnerships*

A Performance Partnership is a group of co-located agencies and sector representatives working on a shared population-level outcome. These outcomes will change over time reflecting the natural evolution in area concerns. An enduring concern and the region's number one growth strategy is positive youth development. Further, assuring the conditions that promote positive youth development simultaneously addresses other pressing community concerns and equity in particular. As such, the first Performance Partnership and co-locating agencies are focused on positive youth development for the region.

Additional partnerships will form around other community concerns and the District is intended to make such formation easier, faster, and more effective. Current frameworks for collaborative work include *collective impact* and *community development for health*. A Performance Partnership is a coalition working to achieve a population-level social outcome with support from the Anchors and from the Center for Partnership Performance in particular.

*Communities of Practice*

A Community of Practice is an ad hoc group of actors focused on specific sectors, strategies or cross-cutting challenges. Examples include youth engagement, social entrepreneurship, and community-based research. Outcomes produced by Communities of Practice include specific innovations in programs, management strategies, and sector or population engagement. Communities of Practice are sponsored and facilitated by one of the three Anchors. The District is currently exploring the following communities of practice:

1. Data. [Community of Practice Sponsored by the Center for Partnership Performance]
   There is no precision without data. Data collection, sharing, analysis, and visualization remain a key barrier in effective community action. Emerging research and national pilot projects (such as with SAS and Tableau) show promise and suggest the time is right to advance a new generation of shared measurement for the St Louis Region. While data is necessary at all three levels (program, organization, and community/partnership) research shows that the enabling context provided by a community partnership is key to successful data use and management and so the data community of practice is sponsored by the Center for Partnership Performance.

2. Shared Services. [Sponsor: Partnership for Non-Profit Excellence]
   Co-location creates efficiency through cost sharing arrangements and shared organizational services in accounting and audit, information technology, and facilities maintenance. This shared services community of practice involves all co-located agencies regardless of their Performance Partnership affiliation in order to maximize the value and return on investment of the District.

3. Communities of Faith. [Sponsor: Center for Partnership Performance]
   Instrumental to community development, the pursuit of social justice, and well-being are the myriad faith traditions that have strengthened our region since its founding. Effectively engaging communities of faith and better understanding their role in community collaboration is the focus of this Community of Practice.

4. Philanthropy. [Community of Practice Sponsored by the District]
   The role of foundations, corporate donors, and major benefactors is changing rapidly. How donors can act in concert and when and how should they be involved in providing more than money to foster community outcomes are questions that motivate the philanthropy Community of Practice.

5. University/Community Research. [Community of Practice Sponsored by the District]
   Establishing a community-driven research agenda that invokes a variety of academic institutions, research traditions, and scientists is required to advance St Louis institutions and outcomes. This community of practice brings community leaders, organizational executives, and researchers together in common cause to advance learning about effective social interventions and the conditions under which they can succeed.

6. Back Bone Support Functions. [Sponsor: Center for Partnership Performance]
   Emerging research has identified specific "back bone" functions that enable partnership success. Without these backbone supports community partnerships are far less effective. Area agencies could provide staff dedicated to specific partnership and provide ongoing support by guiding the partnership's vision and strategy, supporting aligned activities, establishing shared measurement, building public will, advancing policy, and mobilizing resources.

7. Alumni and Advisory Panel – the Wise Owls**.** [Community of Practice Sponsored by the District]
   The region must capture the knowledge and wisdom gained by our most experienced leaders. This District will provide an opportunity for retired leaders to mentor, coach, and advise by giving them both a physical office and a structure for interacting with the social sector.

8. Everybody Leads -Youth engagement. [Community of Practice Sponsored by the District]
   Area youth are essential resources for change. Young people can be more effectively engaged in setting community priorities, identifying solutions, and taking action. Youth are an invaluable

resource now, not just in the future when they become adults. Youth engagement is not a supplementary effort for the benefit of the youth. Youth engagement is a central strategy by which outcomes are more likely to be achieved.

9. Non-Profit Law and Finance. [Sponsor: Partnership for Non-Profit Excellence]
Modeled on the externships established at the Kansas University School of Law, the non-profit law community of practice provides practicum and externships to law students from area law schools and finance students from area schools of business. Basic transactional legal services will be provided as well as broader legal advice in the areas of advocacy, policy, personnel, and intellectual property law.

**What specifically will be the focus of the Anchors?**

National Center for Program Innovation & Replication.

The national movement toward evidence-based practice requires organizations that can facilitate reliable and affordable replication at scale. This is a substantial challenge as successful replication requires the capacity to: create sustainable business models including appropriate 'go to market' strategies; define implementation strategies including the infrastructure for ensuring repeatability with consistent outcomes; define processes for evaluation, learning and innovation; and outlining practice and investment policies that create a hospitable environment for scaling what works.

This Center will serve to accelerate growth and innovation among the region's existing national replicators for and across their programs.  It will also serve as an incubator and technical assistance center to support existing and aspiring St Louis youth serving entities to determine their potential for scaling and to support them when ready.

As it matures the Center will serve as a national destination for practitioner and organizational training in the work of replication generally and for the specific youth-serving evidence based practices of St Louis area non-profits. The Center and the collective reach of its members will influence the uptake of new investment models and policies that can further accelerate program innovation and replication.

Partnership for Non-Profit Excellence

Many regional assets are working to support and improve our non-profit organizations. Important examples include the United Way, the Nonprofit Services Center, The Mission Center, and our local universities. However, the region has yet to agree upon a set of common measures for organizational excellence and does not yet have a comprehensive, multi-partner strategy for improving these measures. Establishing such a regime requires a collaborative approach and one in which non-profit organizations have the leadership voice. "By us and for us with support from those who care about us" is an approach that will allow the Partnership to create low-stakes, incentivized, and workable strategies that promote continuous quality improvement.

The Partnership for Non-Profit Excellence is based on the following principles:

Stakeholder Voice – The District's Partnership for Non-Profit Excellence is run by and for non-profit organizations.

Regional Focus – The Partnership advances the quality of a known census of local non-profit organizations.

Low Stakes – Continuous improvement outside of funder requirement lowers the stakes for organizations to be transparent, seek needed consultation, and make continuous improvement a way of doing business.

These three principles enable the following value propositions:

1. Shared Outcomes – The region can adopt a shared model of excellence all members of the Partnership work to advance.
2. Aligned Support – The Partnership can align existing actors and consultants with shared outcomes.
3. Comprehensive Strategies – The Partnership can assure that all the supports required to achieve excellence are available.
4. Trusted Broker – Barriers to accessing current supports can be constructively addressed and the region's newest non-profit organizations can benefit as much as our most experienced.
5. Driver of Demand – By providing regular organizational assessments the Partnership can create market demand for consultation and support.

Key questions for the Partnership for Nonprofit Excellence:

a. What is the current capacity of non-profit organizations in St Louis?
b. How is this capacity measured?
c. How can capacity be best increased?
d. How can the return on investment from such a strategy be measured?
e. What national models exist and what lessons do they offer?
f. How must these models and lesson be adapted to fit the local context?
g. What is already being done to increase non-profit capacity in the St Louis region?
h. What is the quality of these efforts and what outcomes are they achieving?
i. How can these existing efforts be linked and aligned into a comprehensive strategy?
j. What strategies, content, or partners are missing?
k. What is St Louis already doing that is of a national caliber?

<u>Center for Partnership Performance</u>

There are fewer regional assets devoted to improving partnership performance. As a result, the region must leverage relationships with national and international organizations. The District has secured a commitment from the World Health Organization's Collaborating Centre for Community Health and

Development to engage permanently in building the region's capacity for collaborative action. This exciting commitment brings a wealth of science, experience, and tools to the District and to the region.

Public media plays a critical role in promoting community-level outcomes. In particular public media is uniquely positioned to facilitate listening, priority setting, conversations, and education at a community scale. The precise role public media can play in promoting community outcomes will be explored in partnership with the Nine Network of Public Media, a founding partner of the Center.

What specific capacities must be built for strong regional performance partnerships?

*Core Competencies*:  Core competencies are the knowledge, skills, and abilities individuals require to successfully lead, facilitate, or participate in the partnership process. The list of required core competencies has been distilled by the WHO Collaborating Centre for Community Health and Development. The sixteen competencies are:

(1) Creating and Maintaining Coalitions and Partnerships; (2) Assessing Community Needs and Resources; (3) Analyzing Problems and Goals;  (4) Developing a Framework or Model of Change; (5) Developing Strategic and Action Plans; (6) Building Leadership; (7)Developing an Intervention; (8) Increasing Participation and Membership; (9) Enhancing Cultural Competence; (10) Advocating for Change; (11) Influencing Policy Development; (12) Evaluating the Initiative; (13) Implementing a Social Marketing Effort; (14) Writing a Grant Application for Funding; (15) Improving Organizational Management and Development; and (16) Sustaining the Work or Initiative.

Demand for this competency set is worldwide. For example, 5.8 million unique users from around the world visited the Community Tool Box in the past 12 months. The Tool Box (ctb.ku.edu) is available in English, Arabic, and Spanish and is organized around the sixteen competencies. The demand is not evenly distributed. Greatest interest as measured in downloads and read times has been for skills related to assessing communities followed by interest in planning, promoting cultural competence, evaluation, and organizational/partnership management.

*Essential Processes:* The essential processes are key steps community partnerships must take to move population-level outcomes. These are the recurring processes common to all community partnerships regardless of issue or context. Each has an extensive research base that outlines how the process should be implemented. The twelve essential processes are:

(1)  Analyzing Information about Problems, Goals, and the Factors Affecting Them; (2) Establishing a Vision and Mission; (3) Defining Organizational Structure and Operating Mechanisms; (4) Arranging for Community Mobilizers; (5) Developing and Using Strategic and Action Plans; (6) Developing a Framework or Model of Change; (7) Developing Leadership; (8) Implementing Effective Interventions; (9) Assuring Technical Assistance; (10) Documenting Progress and Using Feedback; (11)Making Outcomes Matter; and (12) Sustaining the Work.

*Conditions that Affect Success:*  There are five conditions under which these essential processes are more likely to produce population level outcomes. The five conditions were identified by Foundation

Strategies Group (FSG) in the widely acclaimed Stanford Social Innovation Review article, "Collective Impact" published in 2011. The five conditions are:

1. Common Agenda:  All participants share a vision for change that includes a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving the problem through agreed-upon actions.

2. Shared Measurement: All participating organizations agree on the ways success will be measured and reported, with a short list of common indicators identified and used for learning and improvement.

3. Mutually Reinforcing Activities: A diverse set of stakeholders, typically across sectors, coordinate a set of differentiated activities through a mutually reinforcing plan of action.

4. Continuous Communication: All players engage in frequent and structured open communication to build trust, assure mutual objectives, and create common motivation.

5. Backbone Support: An independent, funded staff dedicated to the initiative provides ongoing support by guiding the initiative's vision and strategy, supporting aligned activities, establishing shared measurement, building public will, advancing policy, and mobilizing resources.

*How are these related?* Individuals require skills (the core competencies) in order to lead the process and participate in key steps (the essential processes). The likelihood these steps will lead to outcomes is increased by the presence of five conditions (the conditions for collective impact).

Key questions for the Center:

a. What community partnerships and coalitions exist in the region?
b. What issues are these partnerships addressing, for what communities?
c. Is their overlap in population, community, issue, or strategy?
d. How might these partnerships be better linked and aligned?
e. How can the capacity of these partnerships be measured?
f. What is the current capacity of these partnerships?
g. How can capacity be best increased?
h. What is the role of public media in community development for health and well-being?
i. How can the return on investment from such a strategy be measured?
j. What national models exist and what lessons do they offer?
k. How must these models and lesson be adapted to fit the local context?
l. What is already being done to increase partnership capacity?
m. What is the quality of these efforts and what outcomes are they achieving?
n. How can these existing efforts be linked and aligned into a comprehensive strategy?
o. What strategies, content, or partners are missing?

**Three Anchors – One Mission**

Not only is each of the Anchors a collection of regional stakeholders working together to measurably increase capacity at a specific level of work but the Social Innovation District's three Anchors also work together to align their work and produce a result no one Anchor alone can achieve. Their co-location is critical to this integrated approach to building capacity. The "commons" approach to governance assures the Anchors will be under the social sector's guidance with an emphasis on mutual support. The Anchors provide an accountable mechanism for all who wish to invest in building the social sector's capacity and our region's ability to achieve transformative social outcomes.