

Business-based Economic Development

TechTown

BLOCKS Business Unit

Since 2012, TechTown’s place-based entrepreneurship programs (Blocks) have supported neighborhood enterprises to launch, stabilize and grow. Blocks’ programs Retail Services and SWOT City remain focused on providing consistent and customized support for pop-up to permanent- stage brick-and-mortar businesses in Detroit.

The Blocks team launched its inaugural alumni newsletter in April, as part of a broader strategy with leadership from TechTown’s PSN & Alumni Manager to support continuing education, peer-to-peer learning and networking, in an effort to keep our network of over 300 program alumni engaged with the organization.

Retail Services

1 Retail Services includes the ten-week accelerator Retail Boot Camp (RBC) program, monthly pop-up opportunities like The SHOP and retail workshops hosted at TechTown. The SHOP is the monthly pop-up held in TechTown’s first floor community space, which offers opportunities to businesses needing first-time selling experience and also seasoned vendors. The results of the initiative’s custom fixture library designed by two local firms, RL Concetti and Brian DuBois Atelier has resulted in an increase in sales, traffic and vendor applications. The new design has afforded businesses to experience how to approach executing retail pop-up events with the same quality as long-term locations. Vendor applications are already being received for 2020, which is an encouraging sign of businesses planning their selling season in advance. TechTown’s retail design efforts were acknowledged in the UNESCO Detroit Month of Design, for The Shop and its “See & Be Seen: Next Level Pop-up Merchandising” workshop, as well as at the AIA Celebration of Architecture event at Eastern Market. These metrics feed the 2019 initiative to elevate and refine the pop-up experiences offered by TechTown as best-in-class in the area and to help businesses see the value of pop-ups as a part of sustainable omni-channel retail operations model.

The retail team graduated 14 businesses from the spring cohort of Retail Boot Camp in September. In addition to the class sessions with external facilitators in the retail buying, merchandising, technology, accounting, architecture and legal fields, the participants had access to one-on-one sessions with the TechTown team throughout the cohort to assist with further business model refinement and preparation for the final pitch event. All program graduates are receiving one-on-one coaching from the TechTown team for six months to help them with the next steps of strategic growth, two with SWOT City, whom already have leases or purchase agreements, and twelve with the retail staff.

To continue to elevate the program materials, the retail team continues to collaborate with the instructional design faculty in the WSU Executive and Professional Development office to refine the curriculum content in the existing workbook and slide deck. Additionally, the team is also supporting the

development of a program facilitator guide and recommendations for pricing to external organizations. This work during the second and third quarter will strengthen the Retail Boot Camp program's position to be a packaged product ready for purchase. This project with WSU began in April and is anticipated to conclude in by the end of 2019.

To increase TechTown's thought leadership in the retail economic development space, the retail team collaborated with the Detroit Economic Growth Corporation (DEGC) to deliver a four-part workshop series offered to Motor City Match awardees called "Designing Your Business From Pop-Up to Permanent". Session topics which included visual merchandising, retail operations, site selection and pop-up sales strategy were facilitated by members of the Professional Services Network in the marketing, architecture and legal fields, as well as TechTown retail staff. To support holiday planning, "Holiday University" was offered as a free public workshop using third-party content acquired from Grand Haven-based consulting group, WhizBang Retailers. This opportunity was the result of a four-day certification and training process completed by the retail team earlier this year.

In order to continue scaling the programming and preserve quality execution, the retail team expanded to hire its first full-time program manager in October. Carrie Vestrand first joined the TechTown staff in December, 2018 as a member of the collaborative workspace team after owning an independent clothing boutique in Berkley for twelve years. She brings a wealth of planning knowledge and operations experience to the group, which will translate to the training, education and coaching needs of the retail small business clients.

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SWOT City

TechTown's SWOT City team has been on the ground this summer and fall supporting entrepreneurs impacted by the City of Detroit's streetscape improvement projects along commercial corridors in Northwest and Southwest Detroit. In addition to supporting neighborhood small business owners through weekly drop-in general business advising consultations, SWOT City has partnered with the Detroit Economic Growth Corporation to deliver free one-on-one marketing consultations with a member of TechTown's Professional Services Network (PSN) to business owners directly impacted by construction.

SWOT City initiated this project with Grandmont Rosedale Development Corporation, Detroit Economic Development Corporation and TechTown PSN Lydia Michael from Blended Collective (a multicultural marketing and brand consultancy) to provide business owners with some key marketing takeaways specifically focused on retaining existing and attracting new customers to drive sales. In September, eight business owners along Grand River met with Ms. Michael to discuss ways to improve their digital marketing strategies. In Grandmont Rosedale, business owner Lindsay Marr, of Town Hall Caffe, has been severely affected by construction with a 70% loss in sales in September. Speaking with Lydia allowed her to focus her marketing vision and intentions: "It helped reassure me in what I was already doing and gave me new ways to expand my marketing."

Submitted by: Ned Staebler, Vice President for Economic Development

In addition to Grand River, eight businesses affected by road construction in Southwest Detroit were able to meet with Ms. Michael in October. In November, another eight business owners in Northwest Detroit (on Livernois) will have the opportunity to discuss marketing tactics to help position them for increased holiday sales.

TECH Programs

DTX Launch Program – Raxplay, the first place 'GM GO' Award winner was accepted into the inaugural cohort of the gBeta Musictech Accelerator in fall 2019.

TechTown Start Studio - TechTown's new program for tech companies at the idea stage was piloted during the summer of 2019. Participants enter the program with a specific idea for a technology-based company and leave 1) having thoroughly tested the idea and 2) having created an early-stage prototype. These emerging founders are assigned an entrepreneur-in-residence to guide their idea. They also are assigned an anthropologist from Wayne State University to assist in the customer interviews they will conduct to test their ideas. The TechTown Start Studio Showcase was held on Wednesday, September 25. Eight companies pitched their ideas. Each winner, listed below, were awarded business services as well as a cash prize.

BRICKLYR (on-demand app construction equipment rental) - 1st Place -- \$1,500

Gas App (mobile app for gas delivery) - 2nd Place -- \$750

Detroit Maid (on-demand app for cleaning) - READY' Award (3rd Place) -- \$250

TECH Thought Leadership

Marlin Williams and Marlo Rencher were featured speakers at the National Microloan Conference held at TechTown in September and the Net Impact conference in October. Marlo Rencher is a featured speaker at the Southeast Michigan Alliance for Economic Inclusion Summit in October and the Inventors Association of Metro Detroit in November.

Nonprofit Capacity-Building & Innovation

Co.act Detroit

Background: In December of 2017, TechTown Detroit was awarded a three-year grant from the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation for \$4.75 million to launch the Center for Nonprofit Support at 6568 Woodward Avenue, just five blocks from the current TechTown building. Partners in the launch of the Center include the Michigan Nonprofit Association and Michigan Community Resources locally, as well as Community Wealth Partners nationally. Detroit's nonprofit community is both diverse and expansive, addressing the myriad needs and opportunities across southeast Michigan with relevant and impactful programming. However, many of these nonprofit organizations struggle to sustain themselves and fight a constant uphill battle to keep their doors open and invest in their staffs' long-term development. At the same time, countless opportunities for nonprofits in our region to partner, leverage efforts and deepen their impact go unrealized, either for lack of knowledge of one another's work or lack of capacity to solidify connections. Through the establishment of Co.act Detroit (formerly known as the

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Nonprofit Center for Support), the Foundation, TechTown and our community partners will meet these challenges of our nonprofit sector head-on.

Brand Identity Development: Co.act Detroit contracted with Earlyworks LLC, a Detroit based strategy and insights firm, to develop an integrated launch and rollout strategy, develop brand assets and a positioning approach to tell the organizational story. A comprehensive and robust website was launched publicly in June at www.coactdetroit.org. Co.act Detroit has worked with Earlyworks, LLC to increase awareness of our programs and services via an integrated communications plan, which includes earned media, social media, print media and comprehensive community outreach.

Staffing: Co.act Detroit recently hired a part-time Community Ambassador to assist with supporting our guests, with an emphasis on evening and weekend coverage of special events. In addition, Co.act Detroit will hire a Communications Strategist to lead and implement the Co.act Detroit communications plan.

Programming: Co.act Detroit received a \$1,975,000 grant from the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation in November to support the creation of a Technical Assistance Fund for nonprofits receiving services through the Co.act Detroit. The Wilson Foundation recently approved a no cost extension for the funds. Co.act has completed the preliminary program design of the Technical Assistance Fund and recently seated a seven member advisory committee to support the fund. In October 2019, Co.act Detroit received a \$10,000 sponsorship from Microsoft Philanthropies to support data capacity building for nonprofits. Since the June public launch, Co.act has hosted more than 100 convenings, events and workshops in partnership with the nonprofit community with more than 5200 people visiting the space. Co.act has on boarded seven service providers for Co.Lab Connect, weekly office hours that allow nonprofit to receive coaching from subject matter experts in the areas of data, IT, human resources, financial management and legal. Service providers have hosted a combined 50 appointments with nonprofit organizations. In addition, Co.act Detroit has collaborated with Driven Detroit to launch Data University, a cohort based learning model in the Co.act Detroit space. In October 2019, Co.act launched the 2020 Storefront Design Competition in partnership with Design Core Detroit, which will collaborate local designers and nonprofits to activate our Woodward Avenue facing storefront windows with art installations that highlight the work of local nonprofits making an impact in Southeast Michigan.

Thought Leadership: Since the June public launch, Co.act Detroit has engaged in several thought leadership opportunities including presenting at the annual Council of Michigan Foundations conference and Nonprofit Centers Network Sharing Innovation conference. Co.act Detroit will facilitate a workshop at the annual Upswell Conference in November 2019.

Talent-based Economic Development

Detroit Revitalization Fellows, a program of Wayne State University

Launched at Wayne State University in 2011, the Detroit Revitalization Fellows (DRF) program has placed talented, mid-career professionals at local organizations at the forefront of the city and region's civic, community and economic development. This select group of doers engaged in a rigorous two-year leadership development program while serving full-time at their host organizations. DRF has been generously funded by the Kresge Foundation, Ford Foundation, Hudson-Webber Foundation, Fred A. and Barbara M. Erb Family Foundation, Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation, Skillman Foundation, DTE Energy Foundation, the Max M. & Marjorie S. Fisher Foundation, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the PwC Charitable Foundation, Rock Ventures, and Wayne State University.

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Acknowledging the changes across the city since 2011, in April 2019 the program embarked on a strategic assessment. DRF partnered with The Work Department and Public Sector Consultants to engage approximately 100 diverse stakeholders including current and alumni Fellows, funders, Advisory Council members, current and previous employers, coaches, other sector leaders and residents via phone interviews, surveys, focus groups, and strategic planning sessions. The goal was to understand and develop a vision for how the fellowship could make a greater impact while continuing to nurture and promote the leaders Detroit needs now. The assessment is now complete and an executive summary and five-year strategic plan will be publicly shared this year.

Over the next several months, the DRF staff will execute the strategic plan timeline, continue to pursue funding, implement alumni programming, and finalize the design for Cohort V which will launch in 2020.

Alumni Engagement:

Alumni engagement activities began ramping up this fall and the fellowship. The staff is excited about sustaining and better connecting the alumni network.

DRF partnered with Dinner for 30 to pilot a DRF Dinner for 20 in September that featured Cohort III Fellow Ritchie Harrison as the storyteller and his wife and Cohort IV employer, Clarinda Barnett-Harrison, as his chef. Dinner for 30 is a live storytelling and cooking event centered around a specific theme. DRF's version was a reflection on redefining leadership and what leadership meant to Ritchie and Clarinda. Hosted at Teen HYPE, 12 fellows attended.

Funding: DRF staff, Foundation Relations, and the Office of Economic Development met with the fellowship's program officer from the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation to discuss funding the program's future initiatives starting in 2020.

Raising DRF's Profile: The Detroit Revitalization Fellows is now regarded as the longest-standing mid-career urban fellowship program in the country. The staff is regularly looked to for guidance from other organizations that are considering launching their own fellowship programs, and to share its expertise. Fellows are consistently being recognized for their contributions to the future of Detroit and the region, and being given increasingly influential professional opportunities. Recent examples include:

Cohort I Melissa Smiley was promoted to Vice President, Strategy and Operations at the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan. Cohort I Fellow Regina Ann Campbell and Cohort IV Fellow Amy Rencher spoke at the National Microloan Conference. Cohort III Fellow Jeffrey Nolish became the Policy Director at Detroit Disability Power. Cohort II Fellow Allandra Bulger was named one of Crain's 40 Under 40. Cohort I Fellow Sarida Scott and Cohort IV Fellow Lily Gonzalez were panelists at the Michigan Nonprofit Association's Talent Strategy Summit in August. Cohort II Fellow Allandra Bulger was a guest on Detroit Public Television's American Black Journal in September. DRF's Fellows' Experience Manager was invited by the Aspen Institute to attend CityLab DC in October. DRF's Director participated in a conversation with the Black Female Project at the Net Impact Conference. DPTV reached out to fellowship to learn more about the program model, explore possible collaborations locally and/or in other communities, or discuss how DRF staff might be able to further advance their work and mission.

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