The mission of the Detroit Innovation Factory is to return economic vitality to the Motor City by helping entrepreneurship take root in a Southwest Detroit neighborhood. The DIF pilots a replicable hub model for attracting supporting enterprising immigrants into underpopulated or “shrinking” cities. The DIF will help new arrivals to start businesses and repurpose existing infrastructure, engaging with local residents to build a stronger community and neighborhood through orchestrated activities and shared physical space.

The DIF will begin by inhabiting an existing commercial or industrial building to create a supportive space for local, regional, and international entrepreneurs. The space will feature a legal help desk, community resource hub and creative co-working office space. A series of micro grants for regional entrepreneurs will attract new talent, energy and ideas from local and international sources. All DIF projects and building retrofits, will emphasize both economic and ecological sustainability. In particular, local knowledge and skills will provide the backbone of neighborhood initiatives and resilience projects.

The Detroit Innovation Factory is a project of World Policy Institute, a center for global thought leadership, and Pilot Projects Design Collective, a design strategy and consulting firm. The project is endorsed by the Clinton Global Initiative, an offshoot of the Clinton Foundation addressing economic recovery in the United States.

At a glance, the Detroit Innovation Factory will:

• Provide a physical place with the resources of space, staff and professional expertise.
• Develop relationships with existing local workforce development, microfinancing, skills training, community development and civic networks.
• Launch an entrepreneurship recruitment strategy to attract job-creators of all skill sets from Southeast Michigan, elsewhere in the US, and around the world.
• Navigate red tape for our entrepreneurs and develop workarounds to the barriers paralyzing Detroit's human, infrastructural, and capital resources.
• Connect entrepreneurs with existing grassroots networks and resources needed to incubate and scale business ventures.
• Activate underused space and equipment while showcasing green tech solutions for adaptive re-use and energy management.
• Create projects and events to energize neighborhoods by bringing together longstanding residents and orgs with newcomers. May include: site cleanup, urban gardens and green paths, open markets, block fairs and retail opportunities.

Ultimately, the Detroit Innovation Factory is a scalable pilot project that is designed to take successes and other lessons, and turn these into a blueprint for urban economic development, with applications for cities throughout the Rust Belt.

Timeframe

• Through fall 2014: Building our network of critical partners and investors
• March 2015: Establish first field office.
• July 2015: Detroit Innovation Factory opens and inaugural entrepreneurs relocate to Detroit. The locally staffed DIF will operate at least through the summer of 2016.

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