



BUILDING INNOVATION EQUITY IN AN INEQUITABLE CITY

Local and National Collaboration to Release “*Advancing Equitable Innovation in Houston*” as an Approach to Creating an Inclusive Economic Economy

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HOUSTON, Texas—TXRX Labs in collaboration with the Urban Manufacturing Alliance (UMA) has released “*Advancing Equitable Innovation in Houston*,” a report identifying local strategies to support urban manufacturing and inclusive growth. The approach-based paper is the result of the April 2018 Equitable Innovation Conference held in Houston, where a cross-section of nine unique sectors convened to have candid conversations around their progress promoting equitable growth for the region that is inclusive of Houston’s most vulnerable communities.

[Click here to access “*Advancing Equitable Innovation in Houston*” report.](#)

Houston’s economy is robust, outpacing national job growth rates between 2010 and 2015. While that should be celebrated, Houston also ranks among the top 10 most unequal metropolitan areas as published in a 2016 Equity Houston report. The city has not completely overlooked the need to increase inclusive prosperity; in fact, Mayor Turner is leading the way with his [Complete Communities Initiative](#) and Innovation District Plan. TXRX Labs and other national, regional and local partners, however, believe **a critical element to providing inclusive economic development is focusing on small urban manufacturing (SUM).**

“Collaboration and investment are key to stimulating an inclusive ecosystem in the manufacturing industry,” said Lauren Calderera, TXRX Labs development director. “An investment in small urban manufacturing yields results and real money-making opportunities in less than one year. Our work here will create jobs, restore pride and provide an above average livable wage for many Houstonians that are struggling to find their way.”

The report focuses on solutions for promoting Houston's small urban manufacturing community, which can stimulate inclusive economic activity, jobs and growth. It further defines key priorities for equity-focused strategies while providing recommendations from promising national practices to help Texas practitioners and policymakers understand the potential partnerships, policies and programs they can implement around SUMs.

“This report shows how Houston leaders like TXRX Labs are starting to blend equitable economic development with local manufacturing assets to lift up communities,” said Lee Wellington, executive director of the Urban Manufacturing Alliance. **“The conversations on display here capture what it is we set out to do through our [Equity Community of Practice](#): invite local partners to take a deep look at what’s working, and what’s not, as we strive to create opportunity for populations that need it the most.”**

In other cities, small manufacturing is redefining the urban manufacturing landscape to one where more versatile firms are producing customized products. As the industry shifts, manufacturers face challenges accessing affordable production space and adequate business development incentives as affirmed in the study. The report states that Houston needs to **develop affordable space for manufacturing and industrial use in diverse neighborhoods**. TXRX Labs, located in Houston's East End, is a start, but more funding will be necessary to truly address the challenges facing Houston's budding innovation community.

“TXRX Labs is already engaged in some of the recommendations that have been addressed in the paper serving as an incubator to unique SUM innovation projects,” stated Calderera. “Houston is on its way, but there is still much work to do.”

Arix Technologies, a manufacturing technology company from the northeastern US, is among the innovation projects incubating at TXRX Labs. After being funded from Stanley Ventures to create drone technology for oil and gas pipeline inspections, the company relocated to TXRX Labs for access to equipment, fabrication support and to beta test their product.

Among the many approaches highlighted in the report is the need to **develop cross-sector partnerships to deliver STEAM-focused education and career exposure**. TXRX Labs has also formulated a partnership with the City of Houston and [Houston Independent School District \(HISD\) to install makerspaces](#) on HISD campuses, including Bruce Elementary, Nat Q. Henderson Elementary, Fleming Middle

School, and Eastwood Academy High School, to build an ecosystem to support small urban manufacturing in Houston by supporting K-12 education.

“Our kids must have hands-on learning opportunities. Research has proven a higher retention rate and more satisfying application-based learning when this happens,” stated Vice Mayor Pro Tem, Jerry Davis. “We must garner more public-private partnership support to expand the work of small urban manufacturers and provide real opportunities for people of color and all Houstonians.”

Through his Houston City Council Service Budget, Davis is **activating neighborhood-based hubs to engage a diverse pipeline of makers and entrepreneurs**, another recommendation from the report.

This paper calls on the Houston innovation community to work together to update policies to support SUMs, establish public-private partnerships and to work collaboratively with industry, small business, criminal justice professionals and educators to construct an inclusive innovation ecosystem that brings economic prosperity to the greater Houston region.

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About TXRX Labs | txrxlabs.org

TXRX Labs, founded in 2009 and located in Houston’s East End, is a nonprofit 501(c)3 makerspace that provides over 600 classes each year for adults and youth to receive training in computer numerically controlled (CNC) machines: 3D printers, laser cutters, plasma cutters, lathes, mills, water jets, and router tables, and the foundational software for CNC machining: computer-aided drafting (CAD), and computer-aided manufacturing (CAM). TXRX’s 50,000 square foot facility serves over 4,000 Houstonians a year and is staffed by professional educators, engineers, inventors, artists, and coders, who help others use high-tech tools to turn ideas into realities.

Watch the TXRX Labs interview with founder and development director.

<https://www.highdrive.tv/hxtv/tx-rx-labs/>

About UMA | urbanmfg.org

The Urban Manufacturing Alliance (UMA) is a national coalition of 800 organizations and individuals in approximately 200 cities. Our mission is to build robust, environmentally sustainable, and inclusive urban manufacturing sectors. We support manufacturing practitioners by cultivating networks that learn from each other; sharing and amplifying what works between and within cities; and supporting the implementation of policies that encourage the development of sustainable, diverse,

innovative, and equitable manufacturing in urban settings. We envision a future where urban manufacturing is thriving in our cities; creating dense, vibrant networks of businesses, talent, communities, and consumers; and reflecting the diverse communities in which it is located through the ownership and employment opportunities it offers.