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Contact: Maggie Crane, SVP Public Affairs, Cortex  
[mcrane@cortexstl.org](mailto:mcrane@cortexstl.org) | 314.422.6783

## **Cortex Secures \$7M from State of Missouri to Accelerate Tech Workforce Training**

*Cortex Hires Vice President of Workforce Systems to lead efforts*

**ST. LOUIS** – In partnership with the [Missouri Chamber of Commerce and Industry](#), [Cortex](#) has secured a \$7M investment from the State of Missouri to address urgent talent shortages in the state's tech sector while also providing pathways into tech careers for all Missourians.

The investment into *Missouri's Tech First Initiative, powered by Cortex* will provide free comprehensive training, education, and industry-recognized certification opportunities to a broad spectrum of Missourians, fostering careers in the technology sector.

Underpinning this initiative are the pillars of [Cortex's strategic plan](#) to grow quality jobs and prepare a diversity of talent to fill current and future jobs. Cortex is committed to accelerating inclusive economic growth and recognizes the value of individuals from various educational backgrounds in the evolving digital workforce.

“We frequently hear from companies we grow and companies we recruit that the most important asset in a tech economy is talent,” said Sam Fiorello, President & CEO, Cortex. “Importantly, there are many paths beyond a four-year degree from a college or university for preparing someone for a successful tech career.”

This initiative, championed by Missouri Senators Lincoln Hough, Brian Williams, and Steve Roberts, was supported by Governor Mike Parson by signing the 2023/2024 budget bill into law. This pivotal investment in the state's tech workforce is a testament to the shared vision of advancing Missouri's position in the tech industry. Cortex aims to leverage its strengths in partnership and convening to help training partners replicate innovative workforce programs statewide.

“One of Missouri's strongest opportunities to grow its economy will come by leveraging the potential of our technology and innovation industries,” said Dan Mehan, president of the Missouri Chamber of Commerce and Industry. “Key to that growth is smart investment to build a workforce that can support those industries. We are proud to partner with Cortex to train Missourians for high-demand tech occupations across the state. The state will see a significant return on its investment in this program.”



“It was a privilege to work with Cortex and the Missouri Chamber to expand workforce development to more diverse communities across Missouri,” said Sen. Roberts (D-5, MO). “These proven leaders will help foster innovation, create opportunity, and drive technological advancement. I look forward to supporting and following their continued success.”

“St. Louis alone currently has more than 7,000 open cybersecurity positions, and only 11% of the Metro area’s current tech workforce is Black or Hispanic,” said Sen. Williams (D-14, MO). “This project will help move the needle on both these deficiencies, providing women and minorities tuition-free training and the industry-recognized credentials needed to fill high-paying, in-demand jobs. Equity must be a strategy for success across the State, and Cortex and the Missouri Chamber’s work will bolster Missourians’ ability to earn higher wages and create more sustainable futures for themselves and their families.”

Cortex has named [Kieran Blanks](#) Vice President of Workforce Systems to lead the *Tech First* initiative and advance workforce training in the St. Louis innovation ecosystem. With extensive experience in tech workforce strategies and advisory roles with CompTIA, the World Technology Games, and the \$75M Public Health Informatics & Technology Workforce Development Program, Blanks has made a significant impact in setting new standards for the future of education, skills-based training, and workforce readiness.

“Our goal not only is to fill the current tech job vacancies but to create a sustainable pipeline of skilled workers, who can drive innovation and economic growth in Missouri,” said Blanks. “This initiative can be a game-changer for the state, and I am thrilled to be a part of this important effort.”

Cortex invites community members and businesses to join this transformative journey, shaping Missouri's tech future. For more information on the *Missouri’s Tech First Initiative* by Cortex, visit [Cortex's website](#).

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### **About Cortex:**

Cortex creates space for innovators from a diversity of backgrounds to transform ideas into solutions. Weaving together people, places, and organizations, Cortex accelerates inclusive economic growth in the St. Louis region. Cortex creates equitable economic impacts by leveraging high-quality facilities, developing programs that build knowledge and networks, and convening strategic partnerships that attract and support emerging and established companies. Founded in 2002 through a collaboration of Washington University in St. Louis, BJC HealthCare, the University of Missouri – St. Louis, Saint Louis University, and the Missouri Botanical Garden, Cortex ([CortexSTL.org](http://CortexSTL.org)) is a 200-acre, internationally recognized hub of innovation and entrepreneurship.