ABOUT US

District Hall is the world’s first free-standing public innovation center: a dedicated civic space for the innovation community to gather and exchange ideas.

The innovation community exists all over the city: in incubators, coworking spaces, labs, private networking events, and offices. More often than not, these resources exist in high-rise buildings, behind closed doors, through security desks — but this physical network is often difficult to find.

Boston’s District Hall takes a different approach. It is a single story building with an iconic shape, a restaurant, coffee shop, and public, drop-in meeting space. Everything about the building is designed to send a clear message: come in and connect with us.

District Hall’s unique character is defined by its civic nature and public purpose. It is a hub for gatherings and events that trigger creativity, inspire innovation, motivate entrepreneurship, and catalyze action to drive the innovation economy. District Hall operates programs and resources to support entrepreneurs and innovators, foster collaboration, and build a strong, supportive, and accessible innovation community in Greater Boston.

At District Hall, we believe that innovation is for everyone. It is not just for tech startup founders or VCs. It is for dorm room entrepreneurs working in food tech, nonprofit and civic leaders innovating public housing, and local artists teaching design classes to urban youth. Innovation is happening all around us, and our mission is to ensure that everyone with an idea has the tools to become a successful entrepreneur or innovator.

Now in its fourth year of operation, District Hall continues to be a bustling daily workspace, a unique event venue, and a public gathering space and platform for Boston’s innovation community. 2016 was our busiest year yet, and we are looking forward to an even busier and more impactful 2017 hosting events and continuing to provide resources for Boston’s innovation community.
District Hall is the result of a collaborative public-private partnership. Envisioned by the City of Boston and the Boston Planning and Development Agency (formerly the Boston Redevelopment Authority) it is the central gathering space of the Innovation District, the home for Greater Boston’s innovation and entrepreneurship communities.

Boston’s Innovation District is an economic development initiative to transform 1,000 acres on the South Boston Waterfront into an environment that supports collaboration and entrepreneurship. By strategically clustering companies, developing new housing models, and building public infrastructure, this effort fosters a lively, 24/7 community full of new ideas and creativity.

To facilitate the success of the initiative, the City called for a central gathering place for this new neighborhood — a “living room” for the community. District Hall was designed to be fill this need and anchor the District, creating a physical space and public resources to connect, support, and strengthen innovators while expanding the reach, visibility, and benefits of Greater Boston’s innovation economy.

District Hall was founded through a unique public-private partnership in response to the City’s call. The building was privately funded and built by Boston Global Investors as the first project in their 23 acre master plan for Seaport Square. The City invited the Cambridge Innovation Center to create an active innovation hub concept. Cambridge Innovation Center then provided initial design, legal, and financial support for the project and accepted ongoing responsibility for the lease. The Venture Café Foundation was involved in the initial planning process and continues to manage operations and programming since District Hall’s opening in 2013.

Our hospitality partners are Gather and Brew, both operated by The Briar Group. The building and the restaurant were designed by Hacin + Associates. Cambridge Innovation Center was also on the design team and continues to provide operations advice. WS Development has since taken the lead in developing Seaport Square, and is a key partner in neighborhood development efforts.

Without the generous support of our founding sponsors John Hancock, Foley Hoag, Microsoft, and Suburban Integrated Facilities Resources; our In-Kind Sponsors IdeaPaint, Philips Color Kinetics, Bose, Haworth, and Digital Sky; our Silver Sponsor Keryx Biopharmaceuticals; and our other fantastic partners, District Hall would not be the unique space it is today.

“District Hall, being the world’s first innovation centre [of its kind], is the beating heart and the physical representation of the squishy stuff, in that it is where many of the meet-ups occur, bringing unicorns and bright-eyed start ups and everyone in between together.”

- Sandy Burgoyne, Future Cities Collaborative, University of Sydney

Office hours sessions at our August Café Night, where aspiring entrepreneurs receive free one-on-one advice and mentorship from experts.
District Hall is not your average event space. It was designed to help innovators get together to grow their ideas, collaborate, and connect to a larger community. There are spaces to support all kinds of creative event formats: everything from off-site brainstorm sessions to cocktail receptions, from hackathons to award ceremonies, from annual meetings to dance parties.

It is a hub for gatherings and events that trigger creativity, inspire innovation, motivate entrepreneurship, catalyze action, expand interdisciplinary collaboration, solve problems, and create the relationships that drive the innovation economy in Greater Boston.

38% INCREASE in event requests from 2015 to 2016

120+ public events

EVENTS

HOURS

ATTENDEES

870+

4,000+

37,000+

IN 2016

Bisnow’s Annual Retail Event, an opportunity for real estate professionals and developers to connect and explore opportunities, challenges, and trends for mixed use projects, February 2016.
DISCOUNTS + SPONSORSHIP

In 2016, District Hall provided event discounts and sponsorships for nearly half of events we hosted, resulting in over $1M in in-kind support for the innovation community.

Through space rental discounts, District Hall is able to leverage our impact and make our space more accessible for the entire innovation community.

District Hall makes considerations for space rental discounts based on the following criteria:

- **Event Mission**: Events and gatherings that help make connections, grow new ideas, and build an inclusive and supportive innovation community
- **Organization type**: Events and gatherings held by community and innovation focused organizations (non-profits, startups, etc.)
- **Free for attendees**: Events that do not charge attendees for access
- **Public**: Events that are open to the public and can be listed on District Hall’s public calendar

At Café Nights, we ask members of our community to define what innovation means to them.
“Boston is such a supportive ecosystem – there’s no better place to build a company. The energy, desire to support, and people here are unmatched. We have so much talent flowing out of our universities, and so many experienced entrepreneurs and startup leaders who are open to mentoring our next-generation of leaders.”

- Intelligent.ly

44% of events in 2016 supported startups or new ventures
Leadership development startup Intelligent.ly hosts their Exchange Programs at District Hall, providing workshops for emerging leaders at rapid-growth companies to build a community of leaders in Boston.

“District Hall’s story is one that highlights that power of what we’re able to achieve when we collaborate. It’s about people coming together to make something for the community at large.”

- Intelligent.ly
SECTOR ANALYSIS

SPARKING CREATIVITY

The creative economy is a crucial component of our community: from designers to artists to musicians to architects, District Hall continues to be an inspiring and versatile space for creative events.

35% of events involved creative industries

CREATING CONNECTIONS

District Hall is a community hub: our space is designed to foster collaboration, communication, and the open exchange of ideas. We believe that progress happens at the intersection of multiple industries, identities, passions, and fields of knowledge.

49% of events involved multiple sectors

16% of events had international connections

SOCIAL IMPACT

Boston’s social entrepreneurship community has grown monumentally over the last decade, with businesses and nonprofits alike working to address social and economic issues in Boston and around the world.

27% of events addressed social entrepreneurship
ENGAGING COMMUNITY

District Hall sits at the intersection of the public and private sector. From working groups with the City of Boston to national nonprofit conferences and retreats, people are putting civic engagement at the forefront of innovation.

55% of events were hosted by government, non-profits, or community groups

ADVANCING TECH

Technology is a cornerstone of innovation across all sectors: from robotics to the internet of things to more sustainable manufacturing processes, technology is integral to human progress.

42% of events involved facilitating technology and building the tech community

“District Hall is a public, ground-level, accessible space – it’s truly a physical representation of how we best interact with people. We want to foster a creative, inclusive outlet to approach problem solving, and District Hall is the perfect place to do that...The ethos of this space really captures the philosophy of being a public innovation space.”

— Cathy Wissink, Senior Director, Technology & Civic Engagement, Microsoft New England
“As a first time entrepreneur, starting a business can be an intimidating process, but having a welcoming, free co-working space that is open to the public helps to remove a huge barrier. This has enabled me to make helpful connections and learn a ton from other entrepreneurs at various stages of their businesses.”

— Natasha Kayulu, Founder, PitPatters

COMMUNITY WORKSPACE

District Hall’s public meeting and workspace has no membership model. It is open to the public on a first-come, first-serve basis – ideal for entrepreneurs, tiny startup teams, freelancers, and more. Every week, hundreds of people come through the Lounge, utilizing the free WiFi, writeable walls, and flexible seating.
“District Hall is perfect for early stage founders — the Public Lounge is free, you can rent private meeting space, and the coffee at Brew is great!”

— Amrita Aviyente, Founder, Date My Wardrobe

“I wrote my entire business plan for Top Shelf Cookies at District Hall. Our team meets at District Hall all the time. It just feels like people are always doing awesome things here.”

— Heather Younger, Founder, Top Shelf Cookies

“I telecommute, so District Hall is a great place for me to work. It’s a place where I can just come & get my work done, with plenty of outlets and no strings attached.”

— Carmel Levy, Senior Knowledge Engineer, Reasoning Mind

45,000+
estimated lounge users in 2016
District Hall is a platform for ideas, connections, and collaboration.

In addition to our events and public workspace, our space is a platform for members of our community to showcase new ideas, start conversations, and build relationships. These pop-ups and collaborations are as diverse and varied as the sectors where innovation is happening in Boston: from pop-up retail to large-scale art installations, from educational exhibits to a full apartment unit, District Hall is a place where ideas are born, developed, and explored. We are reimagining the potentials of versatile, dynamic public space.

SOCIETY OF ARTS + CRAFTS

During the Society of Arts + Crafts’ transition to their new location in the Innovation District, District Hall hosted a pop-up shop to create new connections in the community, feature local artisan crafts, and highlight the importance and potential of art in the innovation economy.

CITY OF BOSTON

After the relaunch of the Boston.gov website in July 2016, District Hall hosted a 3-dimensional public exhibit in our Lounge exploring the City’s citizen-facilitated design process and highlighting the City’s commitment to digital fluency, accessibility, and civic innovation.
**STREET PIANOS**

District Hall participated in Celebrity Series of Boston’s second Street Pianos exhibit, featuring 60 outdoor, public pianos around the city decorated by local artists. District Hall’s piano was painted by local Fort Point artist Claudia Ravaschiere.

**ÜHU**

The uhü (urban housing unit — pronounced yoo-hoo), a 385-square foot prototype compact prefabricated dwelling, designed to start a conversation about smaller, more efficient living in Boston, found a home at District Hall as part of a city-sponsored roadshow exhibition.

**ARTISTS FOR HUMANITY**

District Hall partnered with Artists for Humanity, a local nonprofit that trains Boston urban youth in art and design, to create a monumental cityscape mural of Boston in our Assembly Space. Artists for Humanity has also provided illustration services for dozens of events at District Hall on our writable Ideapaint walls.
CAFÉ NIGHTS

In 2016, we launched our Café Nights program at District Hall. These resource-packed events are modeled off the Thursday night events at our sister site, Venture Café Kendall, which hosts the largest innovation networking event in New England.

Café Nights are free, public events that include a variety of panels, workshops, interactive activities, office hours, and open networking. These events are an opportunity for the innovation community to build connections, exchange ideas, and gather knowledge.

Café Nights are intended to be a resource for all innovators — and we believe that an “innovator” is anyone with an idea. From office hours with experienced mentors to panels with local startups and civic leaders, Café Nights offer innovators and entrepreneurs the opportunity to strengthen and grow within Boston’s flourishing innovation community.

OFFICE HOURS

A key program of the Venture Café Foundation, Office Hours connect experienced mentors and industry experts with aspiring entrepreneurs and innovators for free, one-on-one sessions geared towards resources and advice to help their ideas succeed.

PROGRAMMING HIGHLIGHTS

- Connecting GE Ventures to the Boston Startup Community
- Building Your All Star Team with The Tech Connection
- How to Run a Social Impact Hackathon with Code for Boston
- Product Roadmapping with General Assembly
- Break into Startups with MassChallenge
- Bridging the Gap: Social Justice, Design, and Civic Engagement with BRIDGES Foundation
- From Parking Lots to the Innovation District: The Growth and Development of Boston’s Waterfront
- Exploring Opportunities in Big Data Systems + Analytics

OFFICE HOURS EXPERT AREAS

- Fundraising + venture capital
- Business development
- Sales + financial organization
- Biotech development
- Operational strategy
- Marketing strategy
- Enterprise and SMB software
- Cleantech
- User experience
- Retail and distribution
- Food startups
“We like to think that we’re “fueling innovation” at District Hall via our café and coffee bar at Brew and through our full service restaurant and bar at Gather. We provide a comfortable and friendly space for visitors to the building to relax and connect – all contributing to the community feeling and startup energy in the space.”

— Hannah Huke, Director of Marketing, The Briar Group

THIS YEAR AT DISTRICT HALL, INNOVATION WAS FUELED BY:

8,800+ GALLONS OF BEER
27,300+ CUPS OF COFFEE
7,000+ MUFFINS + CROISSANTS
At the Venture Café Foundation we believe anyone with an idea has the potential to be an innovator, and that innovation is present everywhere. Our vision is to create a network of empowered individuals and communities who feel confident in their ideas and have the resources to achieve them. By providing spaces, programs, and connections, we can strengthen our local and global communities to tackle problems with creative solutions.