

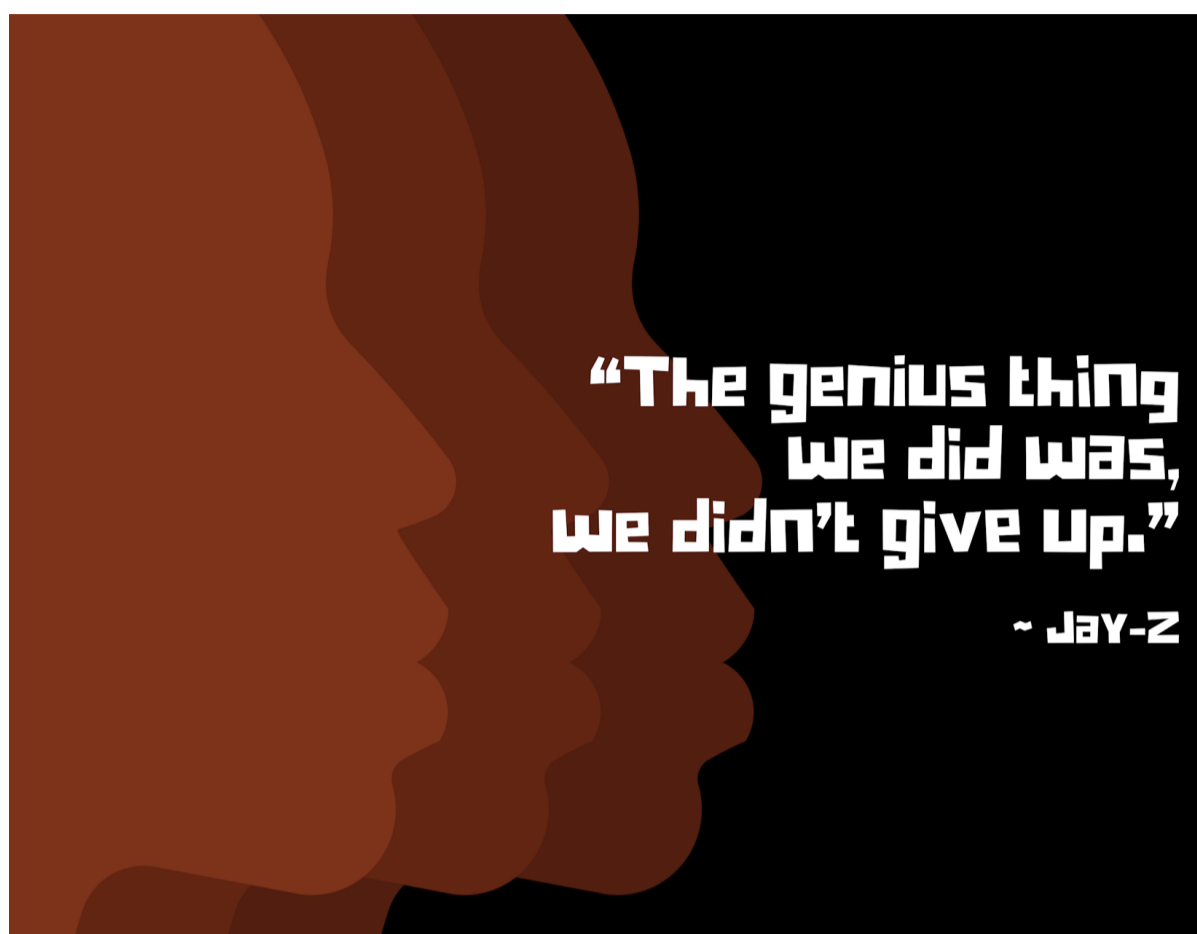
A Message from our Founder



From Henry Rock <contact_point@citystartuplabs.com>

To <sjohnston@tuesdayforumcharlotte.org>

Date 2023-08-01 09:51



**Statement Concerning the Cancellation of the
AfroFuturism Fest
and the Future of BlkTech Interactive**

It is with tremendous regret that I announce the cancellation of this year's AfroFuturism Fest. It was slated to be held during Labor Day weekend and we had plans for this iteration to be the best display of Black imagination, creativity and tech savvy that Charlotte has to offer. But sadly, for a host of reasons, including some out of our control, the decision has been made to not move forward with the event.

I firmly believe in amplifying the idea of Afrofuturism and the experience of celebrating Black folks' magnificence, while also exploring a wonderful future, where we can thrive due to our genius, resilience and technological prowess — hence the theme for the 2023 event — ***Ancient to the Future***. In pursuit of this concept, I encourage you to visit and immerse yourself in the [Afrofuturism Exhibition](#) at the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, DC.

When City Startup Labs acquired the assets of **BlkTech Interactive (BTI)** and the BlkTech Charlotte brand back in 2021, we saw it as a potent opportunity to reimagine our work with Black millennial entrepreneurs around building tech-centric ventures and the support of Black tech talent. From our point of view, the need still exists but how we address it as an organization requires some recalibration. And frankly, while the festival is a wonderful concept – it is also a major departure from CSL's core business, which has always been the development of entrepreneurial talent and capacity, particularly now among the justice involved. This work requires our attention and focus, as there is much to do in this regard. That said, our intention is to have BTI go dormant for a period while absorbing some of its elements into City Startup Labs, rather than operating a separate entity. In the meantime, the international organization [Blacks In Technology](#) has a local chapter, that I recommend you investigate and support - [Blacks in Technology Charlotte](#).

For further information about **City Startup Labs**, please visit us at www.citystartuplabs.com, our YouTube channel or social media platforms.

Back in May, we welcomed a very special guest from Azerbaijan, **Toghrul Ismayilov**, who founded the country's first crowdfunding platform [Toxum](#). Each year the Charlotte International House participates in the the Young Transatlantic Innovation Leaders Initiative Fellowship Program, [sponsored by the State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs](#) with entrepreneurs from across Europe. This year, CSL had the pleasure of hosting Toghrul's stay in Charlotte. Here's a short video about his experience...



WATCH VIDEO

We just started a new **ReEntry Entrepreneurship Program (REEP) cohort!** These participants, all of whom are justice-involved, will go through REEP's LEARN/BUILD/DEPLOY process as they work towards the launch of their new businesses. During the LEARN phase, they will receive business and professional core competencies, digital-tech and entrepreneurial training over the course of 16-weeks. For those in need, CSL provides a laptop and wifi hotspot. Keep your eyes on this space for updates about their progress.



City Startup Labs has also started a new [Restorative Pathways](#) cohort along with our partner Atrium Health in Charlotte and will kick-off another in Winston-Salem at Wake Forest Baptist Hospital this month.

With Gratitude ~

Henry Reck



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