Kigali and St. Louis in the United States are preparing to establish a formal sister-city partnership, with a visiting delegation of business and civic leaders expected to sign an agreement during a trade mission to Rwanda and Kenya.

The agreement would make Kigali the 17th sister city of St. Louis, Missouri, and its second African partner after Saint-Louis in Senegal, which joined the programme in 1994.

The 36-member delegation, led by World Trade Center St. Louis, is scheduled to visit Rwanda from November 8 to 11 before travelling to Kenya. The wider mission runs from November 6 to 15 and will bring together representatives from business, government and civic organisations.

The partnership is expected to create opportunities for cooperation in areas including trade, investment, health, education, technology and culture.

Stella Sheehan, deputy director of World Trade Center St. Louis, said the organisation saw considerable potential in expanding commercial relationships with African markets, noting that businesses from Europe and China had already established a presence on the continent.

“Africa is really where it’s going to be,” she said, adding that St. Louis businesses needed to strengthen their engagement with the continent.

The effort to establish the Kigali partnership gained momentum after Arnold Donald, former chief executive of Carnival Cruise Line and a prominent figure in the St. Louis business community, spoke at a World Trade Center gala in 2021.

Donald had visited Kigali for a meeting of the World Travel and Tourism Council, which held its first meeting on the African continent in the Rwandan capital in 2023. He subsequently shared his experience with contacts in St. Louis, helping shift discussions towards Rwanda.

The African Chamber of Commerce St. Louis and other local organisations later joined efforts to establish the partnership. An exploratory committee was formed in 2023, followed by a St. Louis delegation’s visit to Rwanda in January 2025 to examine possible areas of cooperation.

The upcoming mission is expected to advance those discussions through meetings with Rwandan business, government and civic leaders.

Its participants represent a range of sectors, including crop science, transportation and logistics, advertising, lobbying and healthcare. The Missouri Foundation for Health is also represented.

The delegation includes St. Louis Mayor Cara Spencer, St. Louis County Executive Sam Page and Rodney Crim, president and chief executive of the St. Louis Economic Development Partnership.

The World Trade Center says the mission will provide opportunities for business meetings, market briefings and networking with African partners.