NC STATE UNIVERSITY | Institute for Emerging Issues

InnovateNC

A Cross-City Learning Collaborative

Backed by a diverse group of Partners,[1] InnovateNC is a two-year cross-city learning collaborative supporting five North Carolina communities as they look to accelerate the growth of their innovation economies. Selected cities will receive tools and technical assistance valued at no less than $250,000 over the course of the two-year project.

Background

Innovation is the essential ingredient for continued economic growth and well-being. According to national researchers, including the Brookings Institution, a new urban spatial geography of innovation that is now emerging should be recognized and replicated. The spatial geography at the heart of this emerging model is defined by ***core clusters of leading-edge anchor institutions and cutting-edge innovative firms, surrounded by a wider innovation-sustaining ecosystem*** that includes business incubators, spin-off companies, mixed-use housing-office-retail development, and 21st-century urban quality-of-life amenities. According to Brookings, cities striving to develop on this model must do the following: first, **build a collaborative leadership network**; second, **set a vision for growth**; third, **pursue talent and technology**; fourth, **promote inclusive growth**; and finally, **enhance access to capital**.

The Research triangle park is North Carolina's most notable example of an innovation district. Several cities are also already recognized for developing other versions of an innovation model. However, when it comes to innovation, North Carolina is mired mid-pack among the nation's states. A recent Institute for Emerging Issues (IEI) study, using SAS Visual Analytics software, found that North Carolina sits well below the top quartile of states and even trails the U.S. average on key innovation indicators, including output and compensation. Current trend lines offer no sign that North Carolina will reach the top quartile unless we involve many more people in more of our cities in a turn-around effort through which we

[1] Partners include NC State University's Institute for Emerging Issues and College of Design, Forward Impact, the UNC System, Duke University's Sanford School of Public Policy, UNC Chapel Hill's Kenan Institute for Private Enterprise and Department of Public Policy, RTI International, UNC-TV, the Council for Entrepreneurial Development, the Research Triangle Foundation, and the NC Board of Science, Technology & Innovation.

reconstruct our innovation model and expand innovation capacity. Our list of leading innovation cities must extend beyond the Triangle and Charlotte.

Why InnovateNC

We know that North Carolina cities beyond Raleigh, Durham, and Charlotte are seeking to bolster their innovation capacity by adopting this model. Some struggle, however, to develop a scale and complexity that fosters positive short-term outcomes while positioning their communities for long-term innovation success. As just one indication, although IEI received entries from across the state for our recent Spaces for Innovation Challenge, most submissions were from the many innovation spaces located in Raleigh, Durham, and Charlotte.

To respond, InnovateNC will create a robust cross-city innovation learning collaborative to support up to five highly-committed North Carolina communities as they make major gains in building on and sustaining this new innovation district model.

InnovateNC will result in: 1) increased innovation capacity, activity, and connectivity within the participating cities; 2) broadened demographic and sectoral diversity of those engaged in the innovation economy; 3) collaborative cross-city learning and partnerships; 3) increased visibility and financial support for innovation district efforts; 4) data tools and metrics that can be scaled to serve additional communities in their innovation development efforts; and 5) a model for informing North Carolina's broader economic development and policy landscape.

Structure of InnovateNC

The innovation learning collaborative will include:

- Intensive Two-Year Planning Process within Each Selected City
  Projects will utilize a coordinated asset-mapping protocol developed by RTI International and the North Carolina Board of Science, Technology & Innovation, and they will conform to an accompanying measurement tool that will track progress over time. In each participating city, the process will begin with Forward Impact coordinating the assignment of a local facilitator/coach who will assist cities in forming a local Innovation Council. Each Innovation Council will include representatives of specific stakeholder groups and reflect the community's broad sectoral leadership and demographic diversity. Supported by the facilitator/coach, Forward Impact, and IEI, UNC Chapel Hill's Kenan Institute for Private Enterprise (KIPE), and the Council for Entrepreneurial Development (CED), each Innovation Council will meet monthly across the collaborative's two-year span to develop and begin to implement a cogent innovation strategy leveraging existing assets

and activities. KIPE will provide resources to help shape a creative process for developing each local plan in ways that increase inclusiveness for those involved in and benefitting from the plans.

- Cross-City Convenings to Focus Learning and Build Strong Relationships
  Select members of the various local Innovation Councils will participate in four cross-city convenings (one every six months), to be held at the RTP Frontier in support of The Research Triangle Foundation's effort to continue to expand service to regions across the entire state. These cross-city convenings will feature highly-regarded innovation and other content experts to catalyze ground-breaking initiatives in participating communities; facilitate the sharing of strategies, models, and visions emerging across the participating locales; and document and share the learnings for the benefit of other communities across North Carolina and beyond. We will use the IEI Emerging Issues Commons, an award-winning in-person/virtual ideation and deliberation hub that supports collaborative engagement, to extend relationship building and knowledge sharing between the convenings.

- Data-Driven Decision Making
  Participating cities will engage in unparalleled data-driven decision making. The work of each Innovation Council will be built around two critical planning components. Innovation Councils will use a coordinated data mapping protocol to map each local innovation ecosystem, as well as an innovation measurement tool that tracks progress over time. The North Carolina Board of Science, Technology & Innovation and RTI International will develop these tools, which will be administered by the cities with support from a local data partner.

- Innovative Policy-Making at the Municipal and State Level
  To support and advance their local innovation, the participating cities must have a supportive policy environment at the local and state levels. To inform municipal policymakers and economic and community development policy at the state level, InnovateNC will work with Partners, such as Duke University's Sanford School of Public Policy, to identify a set of innovative best policy practices and bring relevant policymakers together through a set of facilitated conversations. Additionally, InnovateNC will provide opportunities for university students from NC State, Duke, and UNC and other regional campuses to support the development and implementation of relevant city and county policy recommendations through the Innovation Councils.

- Knowledge Sharing through Storytelling
  Participating Cities will gain significant exposure. To ensure that other North Carolina communities benefit from the extensive collaborative learning, Partners will develop a specific web presence for the project, engage in an aggressive earned and social media strategy, publish papers and make presentations at relevant meeting and conferences, curate local and national stories related to inclusive innovation and place-based change, profile an innovator from each community each quarter, and otherwise document, promote, and share findings and emerging resources. Notably, UNC-TV will capture innovator profiles from participating cities and build innovation-related programming around them.

- Supportive Supplemental Programming
  Project Partners will ensure that local Innovation Councils are regularly notified regarding innovation-related conferences, forums, and other similar opportunities of interest. Additionally, each Innovation Council will host collaborative participants for a one-day site visit and learning tour.

Benefits for Participating Cities

This project enhances innovation-related economic development and advances critical new knowledge related to that goal. Each participating city will receive substantial benefits valued at over $250,000, including: a) information about, and preparation to take advantage of, existing and newly proposed innovation programs at the state and national level; (b) guided development of a coherent strategic plan to accelerate inclusionary innovation; (c) valuable new relationships and connections via in-person cross-city convenings and shared web platform, (d) data-driven asset mapping and gap analysis of the existing innovation ecosystem and measurements of progress over time; e) extensive technical assistance to advance local projects while building the base for a longer-term talent development pipeline; f) access to extensive best practices resources; and g) substantial exposure through storytelling programming. All participating cities will function as learning labs for other communities across the state and beyond.

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