Rationale

Cities and universities have co-existed in the United States for nearly 400 years. Much has been written about this long history. Recently, press articles and academic papers have considered the importance of universities to drive growth in cities. At the same time, universities' increasing footprint in cities, coupled with their exemption from local property taxes, has sometimes caused tension with cities.

The purpose of this primer is not to consider this long and complex history. Instead, it will frame the importance of city-university partnerships for urban innovation and propose principles that will help mayors, university leaders and their teams build such partnerships.

Cities are on the cusp of a transformation driven by digital and information technology that will allow them to meet urban challenges in new ways. There are numerous examples of how these technologies will affect the way that cities operate: autonomous and connected vehicles; real-time mobility services; targeted public service delivery; real-time sensing of the built and natural environment; and more sustainable and efficient energy and water systems.

Embracing these new technologies will require expertise and knowledge that city government may not possess. In some cases, it will require new sets of knowledge about cities and residents. Partnerships between cities and universities will provide the necessary expertise and knowledge for cities to take full advantage of opportunities presented by technology.

MetroLab Network includes 34 cities, 3 counties, and 44 universities, organized in more than 30 regional city-university partnerships. Partners focus on research, development, and deployment (RD&D) projects that offer technological and analytically-based solutions to challenges facing urban areas including: inequality in income, health, mobility, security and opportunity; aging infrastructure; and environmental sustainability and resiliency.

MetroLab Network's city-university partnerships are mutually-beneficial relationships in which the university is the city's R&D department and the city is the test-bed. Faculty and students get access to real-life laboratories to test approaches that are aimed to address city priorities and challenges. Cities, and their residents, benefit from the university's technical expertise to help solve those challenges.

Each city- (or county-) university relationship is unique and shaped by the strengths of the university and the challenges of the community. However, the following core principles have defined successful city-university partnerships for urban innovation.

10 Principles for Success

For Mayors & University Presidents, Provosts

1) **Embrace the idea of the city as a "living lab" and the university as a research & development resource** where faculty and students can work on policies and technologies that will enhance quality of life and advance the understanding of cities and urban science.

2) **Formalize a partnership between your city and university with a memorandum of understanding** that includes a commitment to jointly undertake "research, development, and deployment" (RD&D) projects.

For Cities

3) **Assign a lead point-of-contact at the city** who is responsible for managing the innovation partnership. The PoC should have a multi-agency purview, rather than sitting in a particular city agency. The PoC should be a policymaker with a research perspective.

4) **Identify problems that need to be solved and opportunities for innovation** by conducting an internal review of city agencies and by surveying constituents for their areas of importance, concern, and frustration.

For Universities

5) **Assign a lead point-of-contact at the university** who is responsible for managing the innovation partnership. The PoC should have a multi-disciplinary purview, rather than sitting in a particular university department. The PoC should not be a full-time researcher and should have experience in policy.

6) Survey faculty and students for interest in working on urban science matters. **Form a multi-disciplinary network managed by the university point-of-contact.** Create a student club focused on urban science.

Executing on Research, Development, and Deployment

7) **Find the intersection between city priorities and university expertise.** Connect city policymakers with university researchers to undertake RD&D projects in these areas. **Identify metrics that will define success on these efforts.**

8) **Arrange regular, predictable, monthly meetings between the city and university points-of-contact** at which they track progress on existing RD&D efforts and identify new opportunities.

9) In addition to seeking Federal, State, and Local governmental support, **approach your local business and philanthropic community to support your RD&D efforts,** given a shared interest in improving quality of life in the city.

10) **Engage local community groups as partners** to ensure that projects have their support and include their feedback.