University-Industry Innovation Network

Global Good Practice Case Study

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“Smart Cities-Smart Futures”

Building a Roadmap to a Future Where

There Are No Roads

How to energize and tap the creativity of Millennial talent within the higher education pipeline across a broad spectrum of disciplines, interests and geographies.

University of Wisconsin System

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Title of the case
“Smart Cities-Smart Futures” – Building a Roadmap to a Future
Where There Are No Roads

Sales pitch
How to energize and tap the creativity of Millennial talent within the
higher education pipeline across a broad spectrum of disciplines,
interests and geographies

Organisation(s)
University of Wisconsin System, Wisconsin Technical College
System, Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and
Universities, Foxconn, League of Wisconsin Municipalities,
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Research Foundation, Wisconsin
Alumni Research Foundation (WARF), Wisconsin Economic
Development Corporation, Wisconsin Technology Council, WiSys
Technology Foundation

Country / countries
United States; China, Japan, Taiwan (Foxconn)

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Nature of interaction
[X] Collaboration in R&D
[X] Commercialisation of R&D results in science
[X] Entrepreneurship
[X] Public-Private Partnership

Supporting mechanism
[X] Strategic instrument
[X] Structural instrument or approach
[X] Operational activity
1. SUMMARY

The University of Wisconsin System (Wisconsin, USA), with 13 campus locations, represents one of the largest integrated university systems in the United States and one of the most highly respected university networks in the world. The University of Wisconsin has a century-old tradition of connecting with industries in the state through a concept called the “Wisconsin Idea.” The concept was first articulated in 1904 by then-university president Charles Van Hise, who believed the boundaries of the university are the boundaries of the state and that each citizen of the state should benefit tangibly from the research, education, information, and inspiration offered through the University of Wisconsin. This method of outreach continues today.

This case study will review the application of The Wisconsin Idea with the introduction to the state for a global manufacturer new to the area (Foxconn) and its desire to work closely with higher education, including the UW System, the state’s Technical College System, and the Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities. Taken together, these three higher education systems represent a talent pipeline of more than 500,000 students. This highly diverse and rich source of innovation, entrepreneurship and ingenuity is one with which Foxconn wanted to build a strong and productive working relationship.

This case study outlines the development and rollout of Foxconn’s innovative Good Practice, its “Smart Cities, Smart Futures” three-year, $1.0 million ($U.S.) higher education initiative for crowdsourcing the best and brightest ideas, energizing talent, and engaging campuses and communities. This initiative represents a collaboration that encompasses the university, state government and the business community in an expansive Triple Helix collaboration across the entire U.S. State of Wisconsin.

This case study provides a review of the Smart Cities-Smart Futures structure, process, early results, and lessons learned. It is significant due to the size of the initiative’s coverage and scope: All of the public and private university and college campuses across an entire U.S. state, the collaboration of major partners in the university, industry and governmental sectors (Triple Helix), and the range of activities and collaborations involved.

2. BACKGROUND

In an age of low unemployment and increasing shortages of skilled talent, how might a major global company introduce itself to a significant untapped market, successfully engage new stakeholders, attract thousands of potential future employees, and achieve all of these goals in innovative and impactful ways? Such a challenge requires bold, out-of-the-box thinking. This case study outlines Foxconn’s innovative Good Practice, its “Smart Cities-Smart Futures” three-year, $1.0 million ($U.S.) higher education initiative for crowdsourcing the best and brightest ideas, energizing talent, and engaging campuses and communities.
Foxconn’s “Smart Cities-Smart Futures” competition was launched as the Taiwan-based company began construction in Wisconsin, U.S.A. on its first North American production operation for advanced research, manufacturing and high-tech electronics. Among Foxconn’s top reasons for selecting this medium-sized Midwestern state was its highly regarded pool of skilled manufacturers and suppliers. Foxconn Founder and Chairman Terry Gou also acknowledged Wisconsin’s globally respected higher education network, consisting of public and private university and technical colleges, with combined enrollments in excess of 500,000 students and tens of thousands of faculty mentors and educational leaders.

As Foxconn indicated in its early announcements, the Taiwan-based $160 billion ($U.S.) company expects to attract and cultivate a strong North American ecosystem of researchers, innovators, and entrepreneurs capable of building much more than its industry-leading advanced electronic systems. In a larger sense, Foxconn intends to foster and support creative networks and collaborations that focus on finding new ways to live and work, facilitate more healthy lifestyles and leisure activities in addition to building the company’s market-leading products.

3. OBJECTIVES

Foxconn formulated its bold, Good Practice idea in mid-2018 in partnership with the University of Wisconsin System, the Wisconsin Technical College System, and the Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities. The result: A Foxconn-funded $1.0 million ($U.S.) competitive effort designed to energize, reward, and attract further investment in innovative concepts created by students, staff, and faculty across the state’s diverse range of higher educational institutions.

All of the award money will go to higher education—to students and faculty primarily—for bold, creative, and thoughtful ways to build strong, smart futures, whatever that might represent in a variety of contexts. Foxconn’s “Smart Futures” competition is designed to foster widespread involvement in the development of a vital and innovative “third coast” ecosystem the company dubbed “Wiscon Valley” with a vision that the region might someday rival Silicon Valley and other widely recognized tech-savvy hubs.

Foxconn’s goal—unlike any other competitive effort of its kind—was to crowdsource a wide spectrum of innovative ideas and to elicit collaborations from the best and brightest students and faculty innovators. Following discussions with leaders from the state’s public and private educational institutions, the public-private Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation entity, the Wisconsin Technology Council and the respective higher educational technology transfer units, Foxconn launched its “Smart Cities-Smart Futures” program in the summer of 2018.

“The ‘Smart Cities-Smart Futures’ competition offers a chance for students, faculty and staff at Wisconsin’s universities, colleges and technical schools to help shape and change the future,” said Dr. Alan Yeung of Foxconn Technology Group and its ‘Flying Eagle’ project in Wisconsin. “The competition is open to everyone affiliated with the University of Wisconsin System, the Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities and the Wisconsin Technical College System, especially students attending these higher education institutions across the state of Wisconsin. These organizations represent a talent pool of more than 500,000 students, faculty and staff across the state. We are encouraging everyone who is eligible to
take part, submit ideas and potentially see them come to life. Whether you’re a liberal-arts major or a math major, there’s a wide-open field for fresh ideas and unconventional thinking."

The inaugural call for ideas announced at a Wisconsin Idea summit attracted hundreds of key partners and Triple Helix collaborators across educational, governmental and business sectors. Within days of the announcement, entries from all parts of the state began to be submitted as part of the initial call for ideas that will compete for Foxconn recognition and rewards over three years. Entrants focused on numerous categories, including energy, environment, connected systems, big-data analytics, nutrition, water quality, and autonomous vehicles, among others.

**Key Program Objectives**

The intent in this competition is to stimulate ideas and innovation. Foxconn stressed to participants that ownership and management of intellectual property rights will be treated in accordance with institutional policy and practice, whether they be conveyed to the academic institutions, owned individually, or otherwise. In the event Foxconn elects to invest in concepts and plans submitted for consideration, any existing intellectual property rights and considerations will be addressed at that time.

Foxconn reserves the right to use ideas, concepts and solutions subsequent and thereto the competition, for its own benefit. Where intellectual property was previously secured, Foxconn will negotiate licensing rights prior to its use.

In its instructional materials for the competition, Foxconn encouraged participants to avoid revealing too much. The company said: “One of the best ways to secure an idea is to only reveal what is absolutely necessary.” Entrants were instructed to submit their applications in a variety of ways, including, but not limited to, short essay, a business plan, poster board pictorial, still picture or video set to music or narration. Individual and team-based multi-disciplinary and inter-campus submissions also were encouraged.

Participants were prompted to assemble diverse teams reflecting a broad range of core partners needed to successfully implement the most innovative approaches for “smart cities” and “smart futures” environments and ecosystems. Partners could include educational researchers and experimenters, business or industry experts and entrepreneurs as well as community-based organizations and entities. The company’s objective was to encourage broad multi-disciplined participation from university faculty, students, and staff across diverse and wide-ranging areas of research and study.

### 4. RESPONSIBILITY

The Smart Cities-Smart Futures initiative is led by Foxconn’s Dr. Alan Yeung and directed by Shawn McComb, who serves as the program’s project manager. McComb works closely with an industry and academic-based project team that includes representatives of the three major higher education units in the state: The University of Wisconsin System, the Wisconsin Technical College System, and the Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities.
Additional key partners include the Wisconsin Technology Council, which has provided back-office support for the intake, upload, and review of the student entries, university tech-transfer partners including the Wisconsin Alumni Foundation (WARF), the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Research Foundation, and the WiSys Technology Foundation, plus the Wisconsin League of Municipalities and the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation. Collectively and individually, these groups provided inputs and suggestions as the program was being developed and additionally assisted with the sourcing of subject matter experts across a wide range of fields to support the evaluation and review of the entries received.

IMPLEMENTATION & FUNDING

5. STRATEGY & ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN

After previewing competition details in media interviews over a period of several months, in August 2018, Dr. Alan Yeung, Foxconn’s North American Initiatives Director, invited several hundred business, education, and community leaders to Southeast Wisconsin, to officially unveil the “Smart Cities-Smart Futures” program at a UW-sponsored “Wisconsin Idea” Summit. The group met at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside campus adjacent to Foxconn’s future North American production site. The purpose was to highlight plans for Foxconn’s sprawling research and manufacturing campus complex and to lay out specifics of the company’s innovative and inclusive statewide “Smart Cities-Smart Futures” initiative.

Even as Foxconn’s manufacturing operations were beginning to take shape at the nearby construction site, the company made clear its complementary desire to energize the world of creativity and ideas across its newly adopted state with the rollout of the “Smart Futures” initiative. Foxconn’s Yeung put out a call to attract the best technical, non-technical, creative and innovative concepts for what “smart” might look like across a full spectrum of categories—with no holds barred.

Any person or team could enter, as long as each entry included at least one student, academic staff or faculty partner from a Wisconsin-based university or technical college campus. The competition is a reflection of Foxconn’s larger vision to articulate how its technology, paired with the ingenuity and creativity of thousands of individuals and collaborative groups, might help to transform healthcare, transportation, learning opportunities, and lifestyles through the “smart” use of technologies which in some cases have yet to be developed and perfected.

As Dr. Yeung noted in his comments during the program rollout, the “Smart Cities-Smart Futures” competition provides a unique opportunity for students, faculty, and academic staff across Wisconsin to help shape the future. Foxconn was pleased to have numerous statewide organizations join in this initiative. Together they have helped Foxconn to inspire and energize the immense statewide talent pool to submit ideas and potentially to see them come to life. As Foxconn builds its robust 8K+5G ecosystem in Wisconsin, the “Smart Cities-Smart Futures” competition can help power the state’s transformation into a global, high-tech hub, so it will continue to grow and create new businesses, and thereby strengthen the
region’s ability to attract and retain the necessary talent and investment required to sustain initial efforts.

By way of example, Foxconn outlined the following as areas of potential focus during the “Smart Cities-Smart Futures” rollout:

- **Optimizing Resources and Strengths**: Aimed at efficient use of resources and the ability to convert them into value-added products and services;
- **Improving Quality of Life, Performance and Collaboration**: Aimed at enhancing the softer aspects of lifestyle and leisure;
- **Enhancing a Sustainable Economy and Environment**: Creating ecosystems that endure the test of time;
- **Advancing Smart Manufacturing, Services and Infrastructure**: Aimed at further modernizing the GDP.

A Foxconn “Smart Futures” website specified competition themes, categories and timelines. The web/back office support was developed in conjunction with the Wisconsin Technology Council, a key support partner that for several years has managed the Governor’s Statewide Business Plan Competition and represents a consortium of leading business, technology, education, and governmental leaders from across the state.

The Smart Cities-Smart Futures Competition encourages open-ended design thinking and idea-generation in order to bring forward the widest range of innovative ideas for enhancing the lives of Wisconsin residents. This initiative is designed to create an avenue for bringing innovative ideas of all types forward and to be a catalyst that helps energize a “smart future” in a variety of configurations and applications.

Some examples of actual submission categories included Fintech, Energy & Environment, the Internet of Things, Cyber Security, Social Networks, Robotics & Manufacturing, Artificial Intelligence, Virtual Reality, Mobility & Transportation, Smart Homes, Big Data Analytics, Education, E-Health, Food, 3-D Printing, and Sensors.

**ELIGIBILITY**

To enter the competition, there was no submission fee. All students, faculty and staff were able to submit ideas and solutions without cost. The first phase of the initiative focused on individuals and teams from the various higher education institutions around the state, including student proposals as well as faculty-led research projects at Wisconsin’s public and private universities and colleges. There was no upper limit to the number of unique ideas or plans a contestant might submit.

For example, one contestant could submit an idea for a new paper pulping process to the Advanced Manufacturing category and another idea for new paper-making software as part of the Information Technology category.

Foxconn indicated that awards are not category specific. Each submission is to be evaluated based on its own merit and winners will be allocated regardless of the category or theme.
6. **MONITORING AND EVALUATION**

A major objective of any UW System collaboration is transparency and accountability. Since this Smart Cities-Smart Futures program was designed and funded privately with proceeds benefiting students, staff, and faculty, the university and its higher education partners jointly agreed to support the effort in line with an intent to build industry collaborations, foster innovation and entrepreneurship in its many forms, and to support undergraduate research-related efforts. The UW System tech transfer offices provided guidance to Foxconn and to participating entrants with regard to intellectual property protection.

The Wisconsin Technology Council organization partnered with Foxconn to adapt an existing statewide Governor’s Business Plan competition website mechanism for use in the intake and evaluation of competitive entries. Projects receiving initial award-funding from Foxconn or follow-on investments from Foxconn or other sources will be tracked for quantitative and qualitative measures of success, including jobs created, wages and revenue generated, and outside funding secured, among other metrics.

7. **COSTS/FUNDING**

Foxconn has committed to funding the Smart Cities-Smart Futures program over a three-year period, with approximately one-third of the $1 million ($U.S.) financial awards distributed in each year. Actual award disbursements in any given cycle will depend on the quality of program ideas submitted.

**Sustainability measures**

Longer term, the company will need to weigh the value of program effectiveness and impact. Because the program structure allows it to be scalable in terms of size, Foxconn has the flexibility to adapt participant intake to reflect changing funding or market conditions at its discretion.

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**OUTCOMES & IMPACT**

8. **OUTCOMES AND IMPACTS**

Digi.Citi Founder Chelsea Collier keynoted the Foxconn “Smart Futures” summit at UW-Parkside and helped articulate Foxconn’s Next Practice key concepts and its approach to generating creativity and building inclusivity. These include:

1. **Knowing No City Limits** – The concept of the connected city has no boundaries and aligns well with the Wisconsin Idea. This 100-year-old concept from the UW System holds that the benefits of the university should extend to the edges of the state and beyond and should improve the lives of all citizens and stakeholders.
2. **Welcoming New Entrants** – Foxconn is new to the USA, and its campus is envisioned as one of the largest manufacturing sites in the USA. Yet, its direct impact goes beyond the expected plant investment and jobs. Key to Foxconn’s vision is maintaining a focus on building connected ecosystems that positively incorporate a wide range of industry, educational, and government partners.

3. **Preparing and Engaging the Future Workforce** – Foxconn and Wisconsin’s higher education partners are working to transform traditional relationships of isolation and separation into webs of interconnectedness in all areas. This includes joint development of curriculum and connected systems that support future production and job requirements.

4. **Allowing Innovation to Attract Innovation** – Foxconn recognizes that successful cities of the future will have self-renewing tendencies that help to attract and retain top talent and thus become even more effective as future innovation hubs.

Observers noted that the Foxconn Smart Futures effort is generating “Smart Campus” thinking. At UW-Parkside, for example, a philosophy professor organized a campus-wide Smart Futures curriculum open to students of all disciplines. This class incorporated weekly brown bag discussions open to the public and designed to draw viewpoints from diverse disciplines. Early discussions included talks on the challenges of balancing the introduction of new technologies with their cost/benefit considerations and the need for building work structures and living environments that are flexible and sustainable. The faculty have agreed to offer Introduction to Smart Cities in the General Education curriculum and have created a concentration in Smart Cities in the Masters in Professional Studies program.

In the months following the initial rollout announcement, the “Smart Cities-Smart Futures” initiative has built momentum by attracting entries from higher educational institutions in numerous cities and towns. When the first round of the competition closed in late 2018, it had attracted 321 entries from all parts of the state from technical college, private college and public university campuses, with two-thirds of the entries coming from UW System campuses.

To evaluate the competitive entries, 50 judges from business and academia across Wisconsin were tasked with evaluating over 300 student-produced entries. Each submission was evaluated by at least four judges against a rubric to develop numeric evaluation scores. Nearly half of the 88 student winners from across the state attended the December first-round celebration event.

Thirty second-round winners completed a 1000-word essay and two-minute pitch video describing how their idea advances Smart Cities concepts. The 30 winners were announced in March 2019 along with eight honorable-mention awardees. Ideas from faculty, staff, and students focused on energy and the environment, mobility and transportation, education, e-health, food, the Internet of Things, smart homes, robotics, and manufacturing, and big data analytics.

Final awards from the next round of competition will be announced in Spring 2019 with further additional enhancements designed to energize faculty research and collaboration and to refine initial concepts and to prepare them for further development and investment. One-third of the prize incentives will be awarded by the end of the first year, putting the competition on track to award $1 million ($U.S.) over the three-year timeframe.
Foxconn has expressed that by helping faculty, staff and student entrepreneurs and innovators turn their ideas into new businesses, the Smart Cities-Smart Futures initiative represents a high-impact component of Wisconsin’s innovation climate. Wisconsin Technology Council President Tom Still has observed that high-profile, private-sector business leaders and entrepreneurs who serve on the awards selection subcommittees volunteer significant time and effort each year to help young companies successfully launch and grow their start-ups in Wisconsin.

Some early results of this public-private partnership with the university include the following:

- Since the program was announced in mid-2018, nearly 125 participants have received grant funding to support their Smart Cities-Smart Futures initiatives and some of these entrants have begun to attract additional capital through investments and crowdfunding support. Applications for intellectual property protection through WiSys have increased over the same time period.

- In April 2019, the Wisconsin City of Racine was named one of five finalists in a national competition of Smart Cities collaborations. This effort was spearheaded by the city adjacent to the Foxconn manufacturing site and home of the University of Wisconsin-Parkside which served as the launch site for the initial Smart Cities-Smart Futures summit in 2018.

9. INVOLVED STAKEHOLDERS AND BENEFICIARIES

The University of Wisconsin’s “Triple Helix” Public Private Partnerships (P3) extend to a wide range of industry, non-profit, and governmental stakeholders, many of which have supported the Foxconn Smart Cities-Smart Futures initiative.

Foxconn has conveyed appreciation to the UW and to its higher education partners for the organizational and promotion support for the overall program effort across multiple statewide audiences. Outside support has come from the League of Wisconsin Municipalities, the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation, and the Wisconsin Technology Council.

10. AWARDS / RECOGNITION

In October 2018, the University of Wisconsin System earned national recognition from the University Economic Development Association (UEDA) for promoting economic prosperity by helping students and alumni build career connections with Foxconn and other business partners. The UW System was one of four finalists in the UEDA Awards of Excellence innovation category from nominations submitted throughout North America. The project was characterized as an innovative, scalable, and sustainable solution that should be replicated.

UW System President Ray Cross said, “The UW System is proud to be recognized for developing innovative partnerships and building effective networks statewide to connect talented students and alumni with businesses looking to employ them.”

The university’s principal governmental collaborator further commented: “We are pleased to be partnering with the UW System, the Wisconsin Technical College System, and Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities to support entrepreneurship and build careers for Wisconsin residents,” said Tricia Braun, Deputy Secretary and Chief Operating
LESSONS LEARNED

11. PRIMARY CHALLENGES

Fostering a sustainable culture of change related to the third element of the university’s three-part mission of teaching, research, and community service requires engagement and buy-in from all levels of the academic organization. Although university systems do not typically operate at the speed of business, a compelling case can be made for building nimble and flexible partnerships across the academic/business cultural divide that benefit students and can integrate research and learning with career success. The Foxconn Smart Cities-Smart Futures initiative is one current example of such a partnership.

Discussions at the UW System board level (with business, government, and educational leaders and partners as represented in this case study) have highlighted the challenges encountered and finesse required to successfully create a climate of acceptance and partnership and have helped to foster bridge-building efforts.

Students, staff, and faculty who have received recognition for work done in conjunction with Foxconn’s Smart Cities-Smart Futures initiative provide inspiration to others and have helped to strengthen connectivity among students, business, and government partners in more meaningful and authentic ways.

As UW System leaders pointed out during periodic overviews of UW System Triple Helix Initiatives, the organization and its higher education partners and collaborators have made significant progress toward support of the university’s important mission of entrepreneurial outreach.

12. TRANSFERABILITY

As a guide for considering adaptation of certain elements of the UW System initiatives described, several key factors will enhance the prospects for success. First, leadership support is critical at the highest levels of the university structure for economic development initiatives to be embraced and to gain traction across a diverse series of departments, colleges, and campuses.

Second, it is essential to have buy-in for key strategic initiatives from a broad range of partners both inside and external to the university. Finally, it is important to execute on a small number of tactics that can generate early successes and build momentum and to recognize and reward faculty and business partners who invest time, talent, and resources in these projects.

In conclusion, the Foxconn Smart Cities-Smart Futures program has helped the university embody its third mission of outreach and the “Wisconsin Idea.” The Smart Cities collaboration
has proven to be a catalyst in supporting students, faculty and alumni in their efforts to move ideas more quickly and efficiently to commercialization.

The public-private partnerships that are being formed as a result of Smart Cities-Smart Futures participation will help to foster a more vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem on college and university campuses across Wisconsin. In turn, these efforts will help to create a solid foundation for future collaborative efforts that connect higher education with industry and which attract and retain talent in a state that depends on this brainpower to continue to generate economic vibrancy and further innovation.

FURTHER INFORMATION

13. PUBLICATIONS / ARTICLES


Foxconn launches “Smart Cities-Smart Futures” competition (Sept. 17, 2018) [https://wisconsintechnologycouncil.com/46799/]

Smart Cities-Smart Futures competition seeks college students’ innovative ideas (September 25, 2018) [https://inwisconsin.com/blog/smart-cities-smart-futures-competition-seeks-college-students-innovative-ideas/]


Foxconn Smart Cities-Smart Futures website https://wismartcities-smartfutures.com/. Twitter @SmartCitiesWI and hashtag #SmartCitiesWI, Facebook: facebook.com/SmartCitiesWI, Instagram: Instagram.com/smartcitieswi, LinkedIn: linkedin.com/company/smartcitiesWI.


Foxconn Announces Round Two Finalists, March 10, 2019: https://wismartcities-smartfutures.com/round-two-winners/


UW System Economic Development Web Portal: wisconsin.edu/economic-development/

University of Wisconsin System https://www.wisconsin.edu

Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities www.waicu.org

Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC): inwisconsin.com and wedc.org

Wisconsin Technical College System https://www.wtcsystem.edu

Wisconsin Technology Council https://wisconsintechnologycouncil.com

14. KEYWORDS

Innovation, entrepreneurial ecosystem, industrial partnership, public-private partnership, strategic business development, Smart Cities, Triple Helix, University of Wisconsin System, Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (WAICU), Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC), Wisconsin Technical College System (WCTS), Wisconsin Technology Council.
Nature of Activity

- Collaboration in R&D
- Commercialization of R&D Results
- Lifelong Learning
- Curriculum Development & Delivery
- Entrepreneurship

Main Mechanisms

- Structural Instrument or Approach
- Framework Condition

Level of Activity

- Multiple Institutions

Type of Institution

- Network of Institutions

Institution Size

- Greater than 35,000

Keywords

- Smart Ecosystems
- Entrepreneurship
- Public-Private Partnerships
- Triple Helix
- Collaboration

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