THE GLOBAL INSTITUTE ON INNOVATION DISTRICTS

GLOBAL SUMMIT

SUMMARY

Plenary Sessions and Friday Working Group Sessions

DISTRITO DE INNOVACIÓN MONTERREY

Tecnológico de Monterrey

distritotec

THE GLOBAL INSTITUTE ON INNOVATION DISTRICTS
GLOBAL SUMMIT

In April 2025, GIID convened its inaugural Global Summit at the Monterrey Innovation District in Mexico. This large-scale gathering brought together over 330 leaders active in long-established and newly-emerging innovation ecosystems from around the world.

Over three days, participants explored emerging trends, forged strategic connections, and exchanged actionable strategies to advance the practice of innovation districts globally.

The Summit detailed how, in the span of a single decade, districts are advancing their unique value proposition through new linkages with industry, R&D institutions, government, intermediaries, and others in the innovation ecosystem.

Top outcomes from the Summit include:

- **New empirically robust research** on the evolution and key drivers of the district model;
- **Personal connections** and dedicated time for district teams and other leaders to network and exchange ideas;
- **Proven tactics and strategies** for how districts, governments, and industry leaders are responding to innovation imperatives; and
- **In-depth, practical workshops** to help districts multiply growth in their cities and regions.

DISTRITO DE INNOVACIÓN MONTERREY
Tecnológico de Monterrey
distritotec

THE GLOBAL INSTITUTE ON INNOVATION DISTRICTS

GLOBAL SUMMIT

Overview

3 Days

34 Plenaries, workshops & networking activities

64 Speakers

Global Visibility

30+ National & international media mentions

500k People engaged online around Global Summit

9.6M Reach across social media

The Summit defined how, at a time of considerable economic and geopolitical uncertainty, innovation districts are playing an increasingly important role locally, regionally, and nationally as they take on global macro forces, including the imperatives to:

DELIVER

How districts attract, train and retain a diverse talent pool for next gen technologies from the earliest stages through the highest levels.

DECARBONIZE

How districts serve as catalysts, facilitators, and repositories of a web of R&D and new technologies to solve and scale the energy transition and energy-water nexus.

DERISK

How districts are leveraging significant shifts in production and supply chains to address national security concerns and the global rise of nearshoring, smartshoring and friendshoring.

Mexico's first innovation district

The Global Summit was organized in partnership with the Monterrey Innovation District, a rising hub in Latin America. Even at an early stage, Monterrey is showing important pathways for broadening impact—such as how democratizing access to science can be a powerful tool to leverage partnerships with diverse industry leaders, advance R&D priorities and strengthen a district's unique value proposition.

Over the past decade, distritotec—the wider geography of the district—has transformed into a safe, vibrant urban ecosystem where innovation thrives through thoughtful placemaking. Overall, the Monterrey Innovation District exemplifies how to generate inclusive, long-term value through deep collaborations across academia, industry, public institutions, and the surrounding community.

Innovation districts and other leaders traveled far to come together.

330 Participants

5 Global Regions | **19** Countries | **48** Innovation Districts

Europe
- Bath Riverside Innovation Quarter
- Birmingham Innovation Precinct
- Central Innovation District
- Knowledge Quarter London
- Knowledge Quarter Zuidas
- MIND Milano Innovation District
- Oslo Science City

Latin America
- Bogotá Campus of Science, Technology, and Innovation
- City of Knowledge
- District 100
- distritoQRO
- Guadalajara Innovation District
- Medellín Innovation District, Ruta N
- Monterrey Innovation District
- Ñuble Innovation District
- Tlalpan Innovation District

North America
- 16 Tech Innovation District
- 39 North Agtech Innovation District
- 195 District
- BioDistrict New Orleans
- Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus
- Children's National Research & Innovation Campus
- Cincinnati Innovation District
- Cleveland Innovation District
- Cortex Innovation District
- Discovery Square Innovation District
- Gratiot Site Innovation District
- Innovation Quarter
- Kendall Square
- MaRS Discovery District
- National Landing
- Norfolk Innovation Corridor
- Phoenix Bioscience Core
- Pittsburgh Innovation District
- Research Triangle Park
- St. Pete Innovation District
- The LinQ
- The Pearl
- The Point Innovation District
- Tower 22 Innovation District
- Utah Tech Innovation District

Oceania
- Gold Coast Health and Knowledge Precinct
- La Trobe University City
- Liverpool Innovation Precinct
- Lot Fourteen
- Melbourne Innovation Districts (City North)
- Monash Technology Precinct

Asia
- Nagaoka City Innovation District

Participants Profile

- Global leaders from innovation districts
- Government agencies & policymakers
- Venture Capital & Investors
- Urban innovators & real estate developers

Schedule at-a-glance

Day 1 | Wednesday, April 9

- District & Global Connections Speed Dating
- Monterrey Innovation District Tours
- Opening Plenary | Growing Imperatives in Challenging Times
- Global Responses: Norway, Japan, Australia, Colombia, USA
- Global Responses: Spotlight on Monterrey
- Welcome Reception | Democratization of Science at the recently opened Science Gallery

Day 2 | Thursday, April 10

- The Unique Value Proposition of the Monterrey Innovation District
- Deliver | Talent for Next Gen Technologies
- Decarbonize | The Energy Transition & the Water-Energy Nexus
- De-Risk | Advanced Manufacturing, Nearshoring to Smartshoring
- Financial & Investment Models
- Awards Ceremony

Day 3 | Friday, April 11

Deep learning and tactical working group sessions for district leaders, their teams, and other actors in innovation ecosystems.

1. Building Breakthroughs
2. Measuring Impact
3. Strengthening Regional Innovation Ecosystems
4. Generating Revenue for Districts
5. Active Placemaking
6. Advancing Shared Prosperity
7. Developing a District's Unique Value Proposition
8. Designing Capital Strategies for Startups

Day 1 | Wednesday April 9

I felt engaged throughout, whether by meeting incredible people or by seeing the incredible work of the Monterrey Innovation District. Everything felt meaningful and inspiring.

—Summit Participant Survey Response

1. District & Global Connections Speed Dating | **NETWORKING**
2. Monterrey Innovation District Tours | **NETWORKING**
3. Opening Plenary - Innovation Districts: Growing Imperatives in Challenging Times | **PLENARY**
4. Global Responses: Norway, Japan, Australia, Colombia, USA | **PLENARY**
5. Global Responses: Spotlight on Monterrey | **PLENARY**
6. Welcome Reception | Democratization of Science at the recently opened Science Gallery | **NETWORKING**

District & Global Connections Speed Dating

Opening speakers:

- **Julie Wagner,** President & Co-Founder, GIID
- **Mario Adrián Flores,** Vice President Monterrey, Tecnológico de Monterrey
- **Oscar Carracedo,** Director of distritotec, Tecnológico de Monterrey
- **Edgar Muñíz,** Monterrey Innovation District Director, Tecnológico de Monterrey
- **Pamela Puchalski,** Vice President & Co-Founder, GIID

Facilitated by:

- **Matt Homann** and **Lauren Colbert,** Filament

These interactive sessions were designed to ignite knowledge exchange and foster meaningful connections among leaders from established districts, allies within the ecosystem and stakeholders working in the early stages of developing a district project, from over 64 geographies across the globe.





Monterrey Innovation District Tours

Welcome

David Garza Salazar
Executive President,
Tecnológico de Monterrey

"This summit is not just a gathering, it is a launchpad for building new global partnerships in an era that requires us to bridge divides and reject isolationism ...

... like many of you, we are advancing an innovation district and will use this Summit to exchange ideas and forge new partnerships to take on problems together."

Ximena Tamariz
Secretary of Economic Development,
Municipality of Monterrey

"This Global Summit marks an exciting new chapter for Monterrey. We are using this moment not only to connect with global leaders but also to launch a series of forward-thinking programs and policies that will drive a new era of innovation in our region."

Julie Wagner
President & Co-Founder,
The Global Institute on Innovation Districts

"What will be so powerful—I believe about this Summit—is that the conversations, the new insights and innovative practice will be applied by many in this room ...

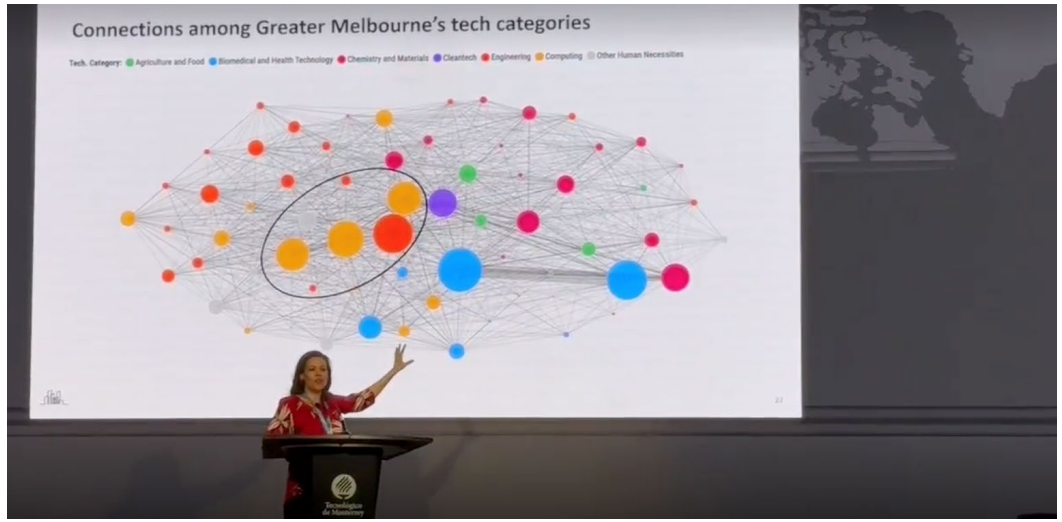
... leaders here today are eager to support the growth and evolution of innovation districts."

Innovation Districts: Growing Imperatives in Challenging Times

Speakers:

- **Bruce Katz,** Co-Founder & Director, Nowak Metro Finance Lab at Drexel University; GIID Board Member
- **Julie Wagner,** President & Co-Founder, GIID

Ten years after the release of the “Rise of Innovation Districts”, Julie Wagner and Bruce Katz opened the GIID Inaugural Global Summit on Innovation Districts. They shared how their understanding of districts has deepened based on work with well over 80 districts, all with unique complexities. Drawing from extensive GIID research, their keynote also elevated new trends that reinforce the central role districts play for locally and regionally, and for some, nationally and globally.



Here are five takeaways

1.

Districts are powerful because they are strongly connected to the global while firmly rooted in the local. This provides institutions and industry leaders in districts with new insights and conclusions they wouldn't reach otherwise.

2.

The acceleration of technologies—particularly those that permeate multiple industries and sectors—are dramatically re-wiring regions and districts in terms of their innovative capabilities. Julie walked through the story of Basel, Switzerland and Melbourne, Australia to demonstrate how these technologies are fueling the rise of new, emerging sectors, which are often further pronounced at the district scale. Districts that recognize the role of enabling technologies—and organize themselves around them—will outpace those that don't.

3.

The role and relevance of districts has only increased in the face of macro forces. These forces include: the COVID-19 pandemic (which exposed vulnerabilities in our supply chains); geopolitical volatility in and across many global regions; the existential threat of climate change; and the growing imperative to deliver talent. These trends underscore the need for continuous innovation and have prompted districts to align around key imperatives such as decarbonization, de-risking, and delivering talent.

4.

In response to these innovation imperatives, market shifts are taking hold at an accelerated pace. The rise of cleantech in and across regions and districts has emerged prominently in GIID analysis. While governments are still debating policy, regions and districts are advancing health security, energy security, and new niches in national security. Districts are also driving initiatives to deliver quality talent, devising new processes and programs to connect local residents and students to new jobs.

5.

Finally, given the evolution of districts over the past decade many cities are moving from having just one innovation district to hosting a constellation of innovation districts and other hubs. In other words, the innovation district model is evolving again—not vanishing, but scaling. Amsterdam, Sydney, St Louis and other regions are places where constellations are emerging, driving new competitive advantages. While constellations could be viewed as a threat to individual districts, GIID argues that they should be viewed as a collective pathway to success.

Global Responses:

Norway, Japan, Australia, Colombia, USA

Speakers:

- **Tom Osha,** Board Chair, GIID; Executive Vice President, Wexford Science + Technology, USA
- **Andreas Thesen Tveteraas,** Head of the Climate and Resources Section for the City of Oslo, Norway
- **Sachio Muto,** Director, Japan Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism
- **Carolina Salazar Lopez,** Strategic Projects Director, RutaN, Medellin, Colombia
- **Diane Dixon,** State Innovation Places Lead, South Australia

Moderated by:

- **Matt Homann**, Founder & CEO, Filament
- **Julie Wagner,** President & Co-Founder, GIID

This session convened a diverse group of international leaders to respond to key themes of the keynote delivered by Bruce Katz and Julie Wagner, with a focus on how global trends are impacting innovation ecosystems. Five speakers, representing the United States, Norway, Japan, Colombia, and Australia respectively, explored how their countries are grappling with volatility—including political change, reduced research funding, and evolving economic priorities—while simultaneously advancing innovation imperatives such as carbon neutrality, defense, health security, and entrepreneurship.

Here are five takeaways

1.

From the United States, Tom Osha highlighted the destabilizing effects of federal funding cuts and policy shifts on research and innovation institutions. He urged innovation districts to rethink their role by serving as front doors to anchor institutions, designing flexible, purpose-built environments, curating spaces that foster collaboration and belonging, and building ecosystems that connect universities, industry, and workforce development. Positioned intentionally, innovation districts can be powerful engines for addressing national and global challenges in talent development, economic competitiveness, and scientific progress.

2.

From Norway, Andreas Thesen Tveteraas emphasized Oslo's pioneering decarbonization efforts. Through the implementation of city procurement and building policy reforms, he illustrated how municipalities can drive carbon-zero transitions using public projects and material reuse. He highlighted the critical role of Oslo Science City in closing the emissions gap – bringing together universities, companies, and investors to co-develop solutions. By connecting this local innovation ecosystem to global networks like C40 Cities, Oslo is helping to shape markets for zero-emission construction that extend well beyond its borders.

3.

From Japan, Sachio Muto acknowledged Japan's lag in establishing innovation districts due to systemic and structural challenges. He emphasized the growing national interest in revitalizing research and development by fostering closer ties between universities, industry, and urban life. He highlighted a pilot effort in Nagaoka to develop an innovation district in the city center, positioning it as a potential model for national urban policy reform. He also called for the government to take a more proactive role in stimulating their adoption, citing global examples of public-sector-led innovation district development.

4.

From Colombia, Carolina Salazar Lopez showcased Medellín's locally driven innovation strategy amidst limited national support. She focused on FutuMed, known previously as the Medellín Innovation District. She also outlined the city-wide plan involving special treatment zones (including FutuMed), entrepreneurship funding, university engagement, and digital transformation, with an emphasis on talent development as a city-wide priority.

5.

From Australia, Diane Dixon described how South Australia responded to national policy and demographic challenges by launching a state-led constellation of innovation districts. This coordinated model aims to boost productivity, upskill the local workforce, attract global partnerships, and drive industrial growth. The state's Innovation Places Framework ensures alignment across government, research, and industry, with bipartisan support and ten-year targets. With 22 connected innovation sites, South Australia is using place-based planning to increase economic complexity and future-proof its economy.


Reservado 4
Global Summit

Global Responses: Spotlight on Monterrey

Speakers:

- **Juan Pablo Murra Lascurain,** Rector, Tecnológico de Monterrey
- **Lorena Guillé-Laris,** Executive Director, Fundación FEMSA

Moderated by:

- **Jeff Merritt,** Head of Urban Transformation and Member of the Executive Committee, World Economic Forum

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This session explored the origins and evolving vision of distritotec and the Monterrey Innovation District. Juan Pablo Murra Lascurain and Lorena Guillé-Laris shared the intertwined history of Tec de Monterrey, the nation's first higher education institution focused on technology, and FEMSA, one of the country's leading companies, and how they are collaborating with other Mexican and global industry leaders to realize Monterrey's ambitions and establish the district as a true problem-solving geography across Mexico and Latin America.

Here are five takeaways

1.
A bold, systemic response to urban decline in Monterrey led to the creation of distritotec, an inclusive regeneration effort aimed at reversing disinvestment and population loss. In 2010, 36% of housing in the area was vacant, families were leaving, and economic activity was low. The district's approach prioritized human-centered design and collaboration, with Juan Pablo Murra noting, "the opposite of security isn't more security; it's collaboration and connection." The Monterrey Innovation District builds on this foundation by creating jobs and new opportunities. Between 2010 and 2020, population in distritotec grew by 56%, compared to 6% citywide—growth driven by bold questions, systemic thinking, and persistence.

2.
Human experience, diversity, and lived connection are the true drivers of change. As Jeff Merritt remarked, innovation districts are not just about places, they are about the people who bring them to life. Diversity plays a crucial role in the Monterrey Innovation District ecosystem, bringing together different ideas, voices, and approaches. This gives the district a strategic advantage and helps shape solutions that are grounded and resilient. As Lorena Guillé-Laris noted, community members listening to each other in new ways and in new spaces can co-create the best possible future. It's not flashy tech or shiny buildings, but relationships that sustain real change.

3.
Monterrey is living proof of Mexico's potential as a knowledge-driven economy. The innovation district is not just a local initiative; it is a strategic demonstration that the country can transition from a manufacturing and industrial economy to one grounded in science, technology, and knowledge. The talent is already here, as seen in students and faculty from the region who excel abroad. What's needed is alignment: a deliberate effort to bring together the university, government, and private sector to create the conditions for researchers, innovators, and entrepreneurs to thrive.

4.
Change agents can emerge from every corner of society. The university is actively investing in early childhood education. To that end, distritotec—now reinforced by the Monterrey Innovation District—includes an early education center, the result of partnerships across industry. This work is rooted in the belief that early childhood development is a systemic, complex challenge requiring a combination of insights from health, education, urban policy, public space, and more. And when these disparate elements are intertwined cohesively, there are dividends for all and real, lasting impact.

5.
Expedition FEMSA is a living platform for systemic change and shared prosperity. The creation of the building was never just about making a shared physical space. Lorena Guillé-Laris shared it was created not only to respond to the crisis, but "to adapt to it and to reimagine the future we want". This vision is embedded in its DNA: a launchpad for collaboration, long-term trust-building, and new forms of international cooperation. The goal for the District is to serve as a model, showing how the convergence of academia, government, and business can accelerate inclusive innovation and a more robust knowledge-based economy.


INTEGRIDAD
COLABORACIÓN
Empatía
Florecimiento Humano
Registration
A-I
J-R
S-Z
Speakers

Welcome Reception | Democratization of Science at the recently opened Science Gallery

Speakers:

- **Mario Adrián Flores,** Vice President Monterrey, Tecnológico de Monterrey
- **Sarah Durcan, CEO,** Science Gallery International
- **Miguel González Virgen,** Director Science Gallery Monterrey, Tecnológico De Monterrey

Global Summit participants were welcomed with a reception outside the new Science Gallery at the Expedition FEMSA building, followed by a tour. Mario Adrián Flores, opened the session with a strong message: innovation should be for everyone. In a symbolic act to democratize science, he took a bold step by physically removing the barriers surrounding the building plaza, transforming it into an open, inclusive hub where ideas and collaboration can thrive without limitations. Mario Adrián also welcomed Sarah Durcan and Miguel González Virgen, who spoke about the recently opened Science Gallery and its role in activating innovation districts.

Here are five takeaways

1.

Science Gallery is a tool for inclusive innovation. Science Gallery serves as a dynamic platform that connects researchers, artists, entrepreneurs, and the public–especially young people–through collaborative, cross-disciplinary exhibitions and events. By integrating science and the arts in spaces that encourage experimentation and interaction, it cultivates people-centered innovation and builds social networks of trust within innovation districts.

2.

Democratizing access through sensory and emotional engagement is key. Art plays a critical role in making science accessible. Through visual, sensory, and intuitive experiences, Science Gallery bridges complex scientific themes with people's living experiences. This democratization is especially impactful for underrepresented groups: individuals drawn in by art often develop greater curiosity about STEM disciplines, while those interested in science gain a deeper appreciation for emotional and intuitive dimensions.

3.

Talent pipelines can be built through youth engagement. By targeting individuals aged 15-30, Science Gallery actively nurtures the next generation of innovators. Programs like the Mediator Program offer hands-on opportunities to develop transdisciplinary thinking, creativity, and civic engagement. Alumni have gone on to launch startups and pursue prestigious academic paths, showing how these experiences can shape impactful career trajectories. In a sample of visitors, Monterrey Science Gallery found that 40 percent are young people ages 18-34, underscoring the relevance and reach of its programming.

4.

Innovation districts are anchored by the community. Science galleries embedded within innovation districts, such as in Monterrey and in Melbourne Connect, function not only as cultural hubs, but also as essential connectors between universities, researchers, and communities. In Monterrey, the gallery has already sparked deep local resonance, attracting thousands of visitors, government officials, and collaborators across sectors, strengthening the district's innovation identity.

5.

Art-science synergies drive policy and societal impact. Installations like *Acqua Corpora* by Amor Muñoz at the Monterrey Science Gallery show how art-science crossovers can catalyze public dialogue on critical issues such as water scarcity, and influence leadership engagement. By translating research into emotionally resonant experiences, Science Gallery fosters informed public participation and opens new pathways for scientific inquiry grounded in emotional connection, local relevance, and social impact.

The welcome reception also created a place for networking and building new connections

Barriers limiting access to the Science Gallery were officially removed, creating a true democracy of space

Day 2 | Thursday April 10

The caliber of the attendees was high. It was refreshing to navigate a professional environment where my fellow attendees deeply understand my work and can offer insight, partnership, and relevant support.

—Summit Participant Survey Response

1. The Unique Value Proposition of the Monterrey Innovation District | PLENARY
2. Deliver | Talent for Next Gen Technologies | PLENARY
3. Decarbonize | The Energy Transition & the Water-Energy Nexus | PLENARY
4. De-Risk | Advanced Manufacturing, Nearshoring to Smartshoring | PLENARY
5. Financial & Investment Models | PLENARY
6. Awards Ceremony | NETWORKING

The Unique Value Proposition of the Monterrey Innovation District

Speakers:

- **Oscar Carracedo,** Director, distritotec, Tecnológico de Monterrey
- **Roberto Íñiguez,** Associate Provost for Academic and Faculty Affairs, Tecnológico de Monterrey
- **Feniosky Peña-Mora,** Executive Vice-President of Research, Dean of Engineering and Sciences, Tecnológico de Monterrey
- **Pablo Savid-Buteler,** Principal Designer, Chair of Design Integration Board of Directors, Sasaki Associates
- **Mario Adrián Flores,** Vice President, Tecnológico de Monterrey

Moderated by:

- **Julie Wagner,** President & Co-Founder, GIID

The Summit showcased the evolving story of the Monterrey Innovation District to help participants see that districts can learn from one another—even in emerging stages.

It is often commonplace for governments, developers and others to view innovation districts as a "real estate play." Instead, a district's Unique Value Proposition (UVP) is built on other hard and soft factors, many of which Monterrey has already developed. For Monterrey, a string of educational, research and economy-shaping activities laid the foundation for what is now becoming the Monterrey Innovation District.

Here are five takeaways

1.

Strategy 1: Urban and social transformation through a public-private initiative known as distritotec. For over 10 years, Tec de Monterrey, in partnership with the community, the city, and many stakeholders, revitalized a broader urban area. The emerging innovation district now sits within—and is positioned to economically support—this broader area with an economically thriving, safe, and innovative community. This aspect of the district's UVP was led by Oscar Carracedo, Director, distritotec, Tecnológico de Monterrey.

2.

Strategy 2: A challenge-based educational model that engages industry and the community. Tec de Monterrey developed an academic learning model for its students, one component of which is challenge-based learning, where students learn about, and actively work to solve real-world challenges.
This approach not only transforms the district into a living lab where students and companies co-develop and test solutions, but also builds a robust talent pipeline of graduates equipped to drive innovation in the real world.
This strategy strengthening the district's UVP was led by Roberto Íñiguez, Associate Provost for Academic and Faculty Affairs, Tecnológico de Monterrey.

3.

Strategy 3: Unique R&D capabilities. Tec de Monterrey has led or financed multiple R&D analyses to identify unique R&D capabilities that could underpin the innovation district:

- *Food Science and Agriculture;*
- *Advanced Materials Sciences;*
- *Business Decision-Making and Operations Research;*
- *The Future of Education Sciences;*
- *Automation and Control Systems for Manufacturing Engineering.*

This data has been used to inform new Centers of Excellence and industry partners for the district's first building. This strategy, fundamental to the district's UPV, was shared by Feniosky Peña-Mora, Executive Vice-President of Research, Dean of Engineering and Sciences, Tecnológico de Monterrey.

4.

Strategy 4: Informed master plan drawing on ambitions of local actors and research capabilities. Numerous listening sessions, workshops, and detailed analyses on how to catalyze an expanding ecosystem led to the design of the 2019 innovation district plan. The plan was intentionally designed so that each building contributes to solving global challenges, linking the university to the heart of the district and uniting efforts across education, research, and industry. This strategy to advance the district and its UVP was shared by Pablo Savid-Buteler, Principal Designer, Chair of Design Integration Board of Directors, Sasaki Associates.

5.

Strategy 5: A place-based strategy connecting to a broader regional ecosystem. Even with a district still in early stages, district leaders understand the power of connecting the Monterrey Innovation District with a constellation of other districts and hubs across the State. This includes key hubs such as the PIIT, where joint work on sustainable manufacturing is underway; the Institute of Obesity Research, which connects to Monterrey's health science ecosystem; and the Monterrey Digital Hub, a driver of AI and fintech collaboration—all positioning the district as a central node in the region's innovation network. This effort to continue growing the district's UVP was outlined by Mario Adrián Flores, Vice President, Tecnológico de Monterrey.

Deliver | Talent for Next Gen Technologies

Speakers:

- **Jodie Eastwood,** CEO, Knowledge Quarter
- **Ismael Bocanegra,** HR Manager, Talent Management, Corning Incorporated
- **Sam Fiorello**, President & CEO, Cortex Innovation District

Moderated by:

- **Matt Homann,** Founder & CEO, Filament

Leaders in cities around the world—from mayors to industry leaders to small firms—argue there is a dearth of talent, limiting their potential to grow and prosper. At the same time, many cities and regions have large percentages of their population either unemployed or underemployed, failing to reap the benefits of a fast-changing economy. Layered on top of this is the unprecedented rise of emerging technologies, which are set to grow in magnitude and play an outsized role in the future of work. Taken together, the need to deliver quality talent is a compelling business proposition that resonates across the geopolitical landscape and among the many stakeholders connected to districts.

Here are five takeaways

1.

Creatively supporting our next generations in learning new technologies is essential, including in areas of poverty. AI is already shaping how we live, work, and learn. To unlock its full potential, the next generation needs the skills not just to navigate an AI-driven world, but to become a diverse, innovative workforce driving progress across all of society. This requires developing tailored learning programs across communities, including low-income areas. When done well, it shows that AI isn't just for coders—it's for problem solvers.

2.

Recognizing how talent needs vary across communities is key. Communities look very different from one another. While many places face underemployment and poverty, there is a need to move beyond the idea that diversity and inclusion look the same everywhere—they do not. In some communities, the economically disadvantaged may be white residents with limited opportunities. In other places it might be an aging population, or due to there being a vibrant mix of nationalities where language is a barrier.

3.

For industry leaders, talent is the new currency. At the same time, technologies are evolving very quickly, requiring a new set of skills for everyone. Fifteen years ago, lean manufacturing was king; now, with new digital tools and the automation of repetitive tasks, engineers must think and act differently. Together with business leaders, GIID mapped and analyzed 43 different skills, leading to the creation of a new framework to deliver talent in different ways. If districts help develop consistent frameworks and approaches for delivering targeted talent, they offer a compelling value proposition for industries to engage and invest locally.

4.

The role of districts in delivering talent is changing. One theory from the Cortex Innovation District is that if an innovation district views talent as vital, it cannot assume talent is simply an input that comes from the surrounding area. Instead, districts can and should play a prominent role in producing vital talent. In that vein, a key focus of the Cortex Innovation District is identifying and developing talent from "atypical" talent pools.

5.

Districts can play different roles based on ambition and capacity. One role is to serve as convener, bringing together partners. Districts can serve as a laboratory for testing various methods of training and deployment, which are then shared with the broader world. They can also work closely with the demand side to understand current workforce needs.

Decarbonize | The Energy Transition & Water-Energy Nexus

Speakers:

- **Ted Hyman, Partner, ZGF Architects**
- **Philip Dautel,** Operations Director, Factory of the Future, Flinders University
- **Stefano Minini,** Project Director - Science and Tech Europe, Lendlease
- **Vicente Saiso,** Global Vice President of Sustainability, CEMEX
- **Ricardo Roriguez,** Head of Open Innovation Lab Monterrey, Daikin

Moderated by:

- **Pamela Puchalski,** Vice President & Co-Founder, GIID

This session focused on the centrality of decarbonization and energy transition as a core tenet of innovation districts' mission and built environment across the globe. Experts from architecture and development, as well as leaders of innovation districts themselves, shared real-world projects, proving that decarbonization is not only essential but achievable and often cost-neutral. The discussion underscored the critical role of innovation districts as living labs for cleantech, and the power of collaboration between public, private, and research sectors to scale impact and supply chain issues caused by macroeconomic uncertainty impacting the former.

Here are five takeaways

1.

Decarbonization does not have to cost more. Ted Hyman, Partner, ZGF Architects, shared multiple projects, including in California and Barcelona. These projects demonstrate that with smart design and integrated planning, sustainable buildings can be delivered at or below the cost of traditional construction. Embodied carbon reductions and operational efficiency must be considered across the full building lifecycle, not in isolated parts.

2.

Innovation districts can operate as "living labs" for new technologies. Philip Dautel, Operations Director, Factory of the Future, Flinders University, described how the Tonsley Innovation District in South Australia operates as a "living lab," combining solar microgrids, adaptive reuse, green hydrogen testing, and education. The district demonstrates how innovation districts can drive the energy transition by acting as dynamic, experimental spaces.

3.

Scalable solutions are critical in regenerative urban development. Stefano Minini, Project Director, Science and Tech Europe at Lendlease, highlighted how Milan's Innovation District (MIND) serves as a large-scale regeneration project incorporating net-zero energy systems, modular construction, and joint ventures with energy providers. MIND's success was rooted in combining long-term vision, place-based innovation, and investment tools tailored for scale.

4.

Innovation districts hold a central role in accelerating decarbonization globally. Vicente Saiso, Global Vice President of Sustainability, CEMEX, and Ricardo Roriguez, Head of Open Innovation Lab Monterrey, Daikin, emphasized how traditional industries like cement and HVAC are accelerating the shift towards sustainability through innovation. Cemex is progressing in low-carbon concrete and water reuse, while Daikin pivots to solutions-based offerings like cooling-as-a-service, digital building management, and open innovation labs in Latin America.

5.

Financing and innovation must align to drive sustainability objectives. The session closed with Q&A that discussed a key challenge: financing green innovation at the district scale. Panelists stressed the need for lifecycle cost analysis, holistic planning, and patient capital. They called for stakeholders to collaborate across sectors, embrace calculated risk, and use data to drive both sustainability and investment value.


SKU MARKET
VR HEADSET
FOOTBALL JERSEY
GALLERY

De-Risk | Advanced Manufacturing, Nearshoring to Smartshoring

Speakers:

- **Emmanuel Loo,** Secretary of Economy, Nuevo León State Government
- **José Alfredo Pérez Bernal,** CEO & Managing Director, Innovation & Tech Transfer Institute of Nuevo León
- **Ian O'Grady,** Policy Advisor, Office of the Arizona Governor Katie Hobbs
- **Diane Dixon,** State Innovation Places Lead, Government of South Australia
- **Joanna Doven,** Executive Director, Pittsburgh's AI Strike Force
- **Ximena Tamariz,** Secretary of Economic Development, Municipality of Monterrey

Moderated by:

- **Mario Adrián Flores,** Vice President Monterrey, Tecnológico de Monterrey

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The State of Nuevo León, in partnership with Tec de Monterrey and key stakeholders, held a strategic session focused on repositioning the state amid the political challenges posed by the Trump administration. The discussion centered on "Smartshoring", a bold shift from a nearshoring-based model to an innovation-driven strategy designed to move the state economy up the value chain and strengthen its global competitiveness. Participants engaged in a dynamic exchange on global best practices, shared their own ideas through interactive activities, and contributed to shaping a forward-looking vision. The session concluded with a compelling message: Nuevo León is ready to lead as Mexico's pioneer in driving an accelerated, innovation-led agenda through a new generation of global partnerships.

Here are five takeaways

1.

Nuevo León is actively reframing its economic identity. Secretary of Economy for the Nuevo León State Government, Emmanuel Loo made a case for transitioning the State from a low-cost, nearshoring destination to a higher-value, innovation-led economy. His remarks outlined a multi-pronged approach: introducing a payroll tax dedicated to innovation, expanding research funding, leveraging the state's unique tech and talent ecosystem, and stitching together a constellation of innovation geographies like the Monterrey Innovation District, PITT, and the Technology Hub. Monterrey's ability to deliver industrial scale and research-driven depth makes it a first mover in Latin America's Smartshoring future.

2.

The PITT is becoming Nuevo León's strategic innovation engine. José Alfredo Pérez Bernal, CEO & Managing Director, Innovation & Tech Transfer Institute of Nuevo León, showcased the PITT, Nuevo León's research and tech transfer park, as a core driver of the Smartshoring strategy. With 33 research centers and two specialized incubators, PITT is working to scale deep-tech companies, address supply chain inefficiencies, and serve as a global testbed for collaborative industry–academia innovation. This infrastructure is already delivering results, from job creation and patents to partnerships with international companies like Vertiv in the data center cooling space.

3.

States are stepping up where national policy is falling short. Arizona's Ian O'Grady, Policy Advisor, Office of the Arizona Governor Katie Hobbs, spoke candidly about reshaping the state's innovation capacity through infrastructure investment, workforce pipelines, and aggressive cluster strategies amid rising trade tensions. South Australia's Diane Dixon, State Innovation Places Lead, Government of South Australia, shared how strategic investment in AI and machine learning in Lot Fourteen has drawn global industry partners while anchoring long-term government commitment. Both stressed that states can act faster, and smarter, than national governments in crafting competitive innovation agendas.

4.

Compute is the new steel: Joanna Doven, Executive Director, Pittsburgh's AI Strike Force, offered a provocative look at the role of AI infrastructure in regional economic competitiveness. Her message: if regions want to retain innovation, they need to secure access to GPUs and compute capacity. She outlined a first-in-the-nation policy under development in Pennsylvania that would offer tax incentives for data centers that prioritize local AI firms, repositioning innovation districts as physical anchors for the next generation of AI growth.

5.

The future of Smartshoring is not just about moving goods, it's about moving ideas. As Monterrey's local government outlined its efforts to strengthen local value chains and Specialized Learning Zones, a broader theme emerged: Smartshoring depends on human capital and institutional collaboration as much as infrastructure. The session closed with a call to build a new, cross-regional alliance of "next industrial cities" working together to drive innovation-led competitiveness, navigate geopolitical uncertainty, and prototype policy responses that national governments may be too slow, or too fractured, to lead.

Financial & Investment Models

Speakers:

- **Ilse Treurnicht,** Managing Partner, TwinRiver Capital and former CEO of MaRS Discovery District
- **Tim Sanders,** Senior Investment Officer at Ventas
- **Beth O'Neill Maloney,** Executive Director, Kendall Square Association
- **Rogelio De los Santos**, Managing Partner at Dalus Capital

Moderated by:

- **Tom Osha**, Board Chair, GIID; Executive Vice President, Wexford Science + Technology

In this session, designed as a Q&A fireside chat, Tom Osha brought together leaders in innovation district finance and investment to explore how financial models are evolving beyond traditional real estate paradigms. The speakers shared their insights from their work across innovation ecosystems in North America and Latin America, with a focus on adaptive finance, ecosystem gaps, inclusive growth, government roles, and collaborative innovation. The conversation aimed to highlight practical strategies and structures that enable sustainable, inclusive, and impactful district development.

Here are five takeaways

1.

Adaptive finance is essential for innovation growth. Innovation districts must develop flexible financial tools tailored to early-stage companies, particularly in sectors like clean tech and biotech, where development cycles are long and traditional venture capital is often scarce. Leaders have successfully used hybrid models combining public and private capital to sustain startups through these periods.

2.

Filling ecosystem gaps requires custom capital solutions. A key theme was addressing the "missing middle"—entrepreneurs and startups that fall outside traditional funding. This includes establishing impact funds, connecting research to market needs, and developing localized funds that meet early-stage capital requirements.

3.

Inclusive and sustainable ecosystems need intentional design. Inclusivity isn't automatic—it must be built into the ecosystem. Leaders in Toronto, Cambridge, and Monterrey implemented targeted initiatives to support women-led businesses, immigrant entrepreneurs, and underrepresented groups through specialized funds and programs.

4.

Governments are a catalyst, not just funding avenues. Effective innovation districts leverage government not just for money, but as strategic partners. Examples included zoning reforms, tax incentives, and state-backed venture programs. Strong public-private alignment is key to building lasting infrastructure.

5.

Collaboration across sectors strengthens innovation platforms. Successful districts intentionally build collaborative frameworks between academia, industry, startups, and investors. These platforms allow ideas to scale quickly and create feedback loops that accelerate innovation. Initiatives like MaRS and Kendall Square exemplify how curated collaboration drives success.

Awards Ceremony

An independent, international jury selected the winners of GIID's first awards. Winners were announced and honored at an Awards Ceremony on the evening of April 12, 2025.

These awards were created to recognize and celebrate the achievements of innovation districts and the individuals driving this important work. From long-standing pioneers to emerging changemakers, awards in two categories—**Lighthouse** and **Trailblazer**—showcased outstanding contributions and pioneering practices shaping the future of innovation around the world.

Learn more about the winners and jury here.

Lighthouse Award
Kendall Square
(Boston, MA, USA)

Lighthouse District Champion Award
Jodie Eastwood, Knowledge Quarter London (UK)

Trailblazer Award
Monterrey Innovation District
(Mexico)

Trailblazer District Champion Award
Christine Wergeland Sørbye, Oslo Science City (Norway)

Awards Ceremony Highlights

Samuel García Sepúlveda
Governor, State of Nuevo León

Governor Samuel García Sepúlveda extended a warm welcome on behalf of the State of Nuevo León, highlighting the state's prominent role as a national leader in fostering cutting-edge innovation ecosystems. He emphasized Nuevo León's commitment to technological advancement, strategic public-private partnerships, and its thriving entrepreneurial environment that continues to shape regional and national development.

Special recognition by GIID
Lendlease and Ventas

GIID recognized Lendlease, a global property and infrastructure group, and Ventas, a U.S. real estate investment trust, for their invaluable contributions to advancing innovation ecosystems. Lendlease was honored for its sustained, long-term commitment to GIID's practice-oriented research and mission, while Ventas was recognized for its foundational support in accelerating the global evolution of innovation districts.

Student performance
Tecnológico de Monterrey

In a vibrant celebration of Mexico's rich cultural heritage, students from Tec delivered a captivating performance that blended music, dance, and tradition. Dressed in colorful, traditional attire, they demonstrated remarkable talent and passion, offering a world-class showcase of regional folklore. Their performance was exhilarating and deeply moving—an unforgettable expression of national pride, artistic excellence, and youthful spirit.

Day 3 | Friday April 11

The speakers were genuinely interested in building connections—it felt like a real exchange, not a lecture.

—Summit Participant Survey Response

WORKING GROUPS

1. Building Breakthroughs
2. Measuring Impact
3. Strengthening Regional Innovation Ecosystems
4. Generating Revenue for Districts
5. Active Placemaking
6. Advancing Shared Prosperity
7. Developing a District's Unique Value Proposition
8. Designing Capital Strategies for Startups

Building Breakthroughs

Speakers:

- **Ted Hyman,** Partner, ZGF Architects
- **Thomas Jansen,** Principal, HR&A Advisors
- **Vlad Pajkic,** Partner, ZGF Architects
- **Dennis Pieprz,** Principal & Partner, Sasaki Associates

This workshop explored strategies and elements for designing large-scale district plans and the signature buildings that deliver breakthroughs. The physical design of innovation districts and their buildings is a critical component of their success—and key to differentiating these places from others, including not only science and technology parks but also downtowns, midtowns, and corporate campuses. In the post-pandemic era of remote work, what are the most effective strategies for designing buildings that promote collaboration, interdisciplinary convergence, and strong community engagement?

Here are five takeaways

1.

Anchor institutions are essential catalysts that can help provide credibility, momentum, and early occupancy to jumpstart innovation districts. Projects like the University of Calgary's Innovation Quarter, Monterrey Innovation District, and Harvard's Enterprise Research Campus illustrate how established universities and research centers orchestrate district planning and often commit to 50–60% of space upfront, making developments financially feasible and strategically grounded.

2.

Designing for collaboration requires intentional spatial planning that reflects how people use space in practice to actually connect. Presentations from Sasaki and ZGF tracked the transformation from basic lobby furniture to sophisticated in-between spaces that facilitate meaningful interaction, emphasizing that true collaboration requires thoughtful design of circulation patterns, shared amenities, and visible activities that draw diverse users together.

3.

Deep integration of community voice transforms innovation districts from contested developments into valued civic assets. Successful innovation districts like Aggie Square in Sacramento demonstrated how projects can evolve from facing community opposition to becoming neighborhood assets through inclusive design, public access, educational opportunities, and workforce development programs for local residents.

4.

High-efficiency, adaptable buildings are a foundation for innovation, enabling both programmatic flexibility and financial viability. Collaboration spaces can only thrive when supported by highly efficient, flexible building designs that pencil out financially, showcasing layouts that accommodate diverse uses (such as research, teaching and industry) while maximizing rentable space.

5.

Sustainability is a design imperative shaping the identity and purpose of innovation districts. Wood construction in Barcelona's Mercat del Peix Research Center exemplified how sustainability principles are becoming central to innovation district design, creating distinctive spaces that attract talent while addressing climate concerns.

Measuring Impact

Speakers:

- **Vanessa Campbell**, Director of Innovation Precincts, University of Melbourne
- **Ryan Helwig**, Principal & Senior Director, TEConomy Partners
- **Emily Krueger**, President and CEO, 16 Tech
- **Pamela Puchalski,** Vice President & Co-Founder, GIID
- **Lindsey Schwab**, Director, Community Relations, Innovation Quarter

This workshop offered innovation district leaders a deep dive into benchmarking practices, with a focus on evolving metrics and methodologies for assessing district performance. Participants explored how leading districts are defining and measuring impact across economic, social, environmental, and spatial dimensions. Through case discussions and peer exchange, the session highlighted practical strategies for aligning metrics with district goals, building a culture of data, and using measurement to guide strategic growth. Key themes included clarifying district identity, measuring multidimensional impact, and effectively communicating outcomes to diverse stakeholders.

Here are five takeaways

1.

Innovation districts are expanding what counts as impact. Traditional economic indicators like job creation and GDP remain important, but districts are increasingly defining success across four additional dimensions: functional outcomes (e.g. research collaboration, commercialization), place-based progress (e.g. activation, amenities), societal and environmental benefits (e.g. equity, resilience), and internal strategic milestones. Ryan Helwig's framework provided a common language for capturing this multi-dimensional value.

2.

Districts at different stages need different metrics. Whether emerging, scaling, or mature, each district's measurement strategy must reflect its current capabilities and evolving goals. At 16 Tech Innovation District in Indianapolis, metrics are used to show momentum after years of planning inertia, focusing on real estate activation and organizational sustainability. In contrast, mature districts like Winston-Salem's Innovation Quarter and Melbourne Connect are working to evolve from transactional data (attendance, tenancy) to system-level impact and ecosystem interdependencies.

3.

Measurement systems don't need to be perfect to be powerful. Even basic tools, such as spreadsheets, phone calls, and simple tracking systems, can generate strong buy-in and visibility when metrics are aligned with stakeholder priorities. In Winston-Salem, a well-calibrated economic impact figure ($1.6 billion using IMPLAN) has proven to be a powerful advocacy tool, even as the district continues to refine its internal data infrastructure.

4.

Qualitative storytelling is often as influential as quantitative data. A strong narrative can powerfully convey impact, especially in areas where data is difficult to collect. Whether using company testimonials (like in 16 Tech), spatial observation, or personal relationships to track success, many districts are relying on stories to bridge data gaps and engage funders, policymakers, and communities more effectively.

5.

The field needs shared baselines, not just best practices. Participants voiced a strong desire for GIID to help define standard indicators, develop common taxonomies, and offer a tiered framework for measurement based on district type and maturity. Many called for baseline datasets, tools for benchmarking, and guidance on normalizing impact per capita, per square foot, or relative to strategic goals. This would support both internal strategy and cross-district collaboration, especially as funding environments become more constrained and pressure for accountability rises.

Strengthening Regional Innovation Ecosystems

Speakers:

- **Diane Dixon,** State Innovation Places Lead, Government of South Australia
- **Paul Jansen,** Associate Director, Organised Innovation Spaces, ARUP
- **Thomas Osha,** Board Chair, GIID
- **Jose Alfredo Perez,** CEO & Managing Director, Innovation & Tech Transfer Institute of Nuevo Leon
- **Craig Rowsell,** Director, Gold Coast Health and Knowledge Precinct
- **Chad Shearer,** Director of Research, GIID

Speakers explored in this workshop the emerging phenomenon of constellations of innovation districts—interconnected hubs within a region that are increasingly coordinated through intentional strategy, governance, and investment. GIIID presented new research on this topic, and participants heard directly from the leaders behind new government-led strategies to manage competition, foster collaboration, and develop shared purpose across innovation geographies. Drawing on research, real-world strategies, and expert facilitation, this workshop delivered practical tools and insights for transitioning from fragmented innovation spaces to high-performing constellations.

Here are five takeaways

1.

Collaboration is foundational. Across the board, collaboration emerged as a central theme. Intentionally fostering relationships across districts, governments, and institutions is essential to building trust, sharing challenges, and avoiding duplication of effort.

2.

Intentional convening builds trust and shared purpose. Queensland's "Connect" program, which brought together teams from multiple innovation districts over an extended period, illustrates how structured and repeated convenings can create strong inter-district relationships, enabling coordinated action and mutual support.

3.

Seizing strategic windows of opportunity is key. It is important to recognize and act on political or funding windows to scale successful innovation district models to broader geographies. Timing, combined with demonstrated success, can catalyze statewide or national strategies.

4.

Constellations require stewardship, not control. Shifting from a mindset of ownership and control to one of stewardship and support is essential for long-term success. Successful coordination across districts comes from a modest approach that elevates each district's unique strengths rather than imposing a top-down structure.

5.

Constellations are evolving. These strategies are not one-off initiatives. They require long-term commitment, ongoing learning, and adaptive governance. As seen in Amsterdam, when municipalities engage district leaders in co-design processes, it creates not only alignment but also political accountability that transcends election cycles.


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Generating Revenue for Districts

Speakers:

- **Nate Hommel,** Director of Planning and Design, University City District
- **Graydon Pleasants,** Former Head of Development, Innovation Quarter
- **Grace Lee Reynolds**, CEO, MaRS Discovery District
- **Mariella Smids,** Director Precincts, Monash University
- **Julie Wagner,** President & Co-Founder, GIID
- **Hank Webber,** Founder & Managing Principal, Urban Impact Advisors

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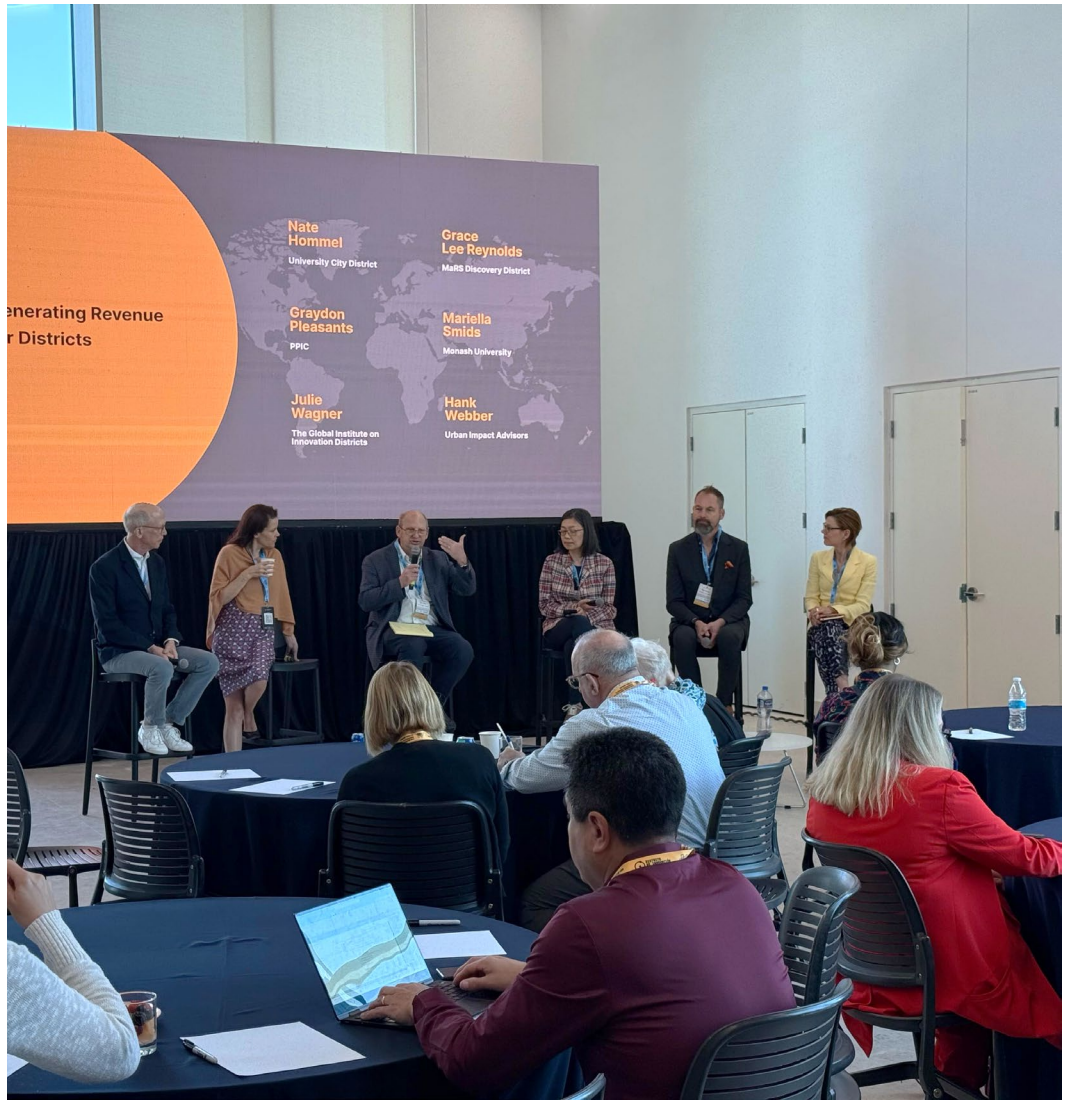
This workshop delivered a strategic toolkit for developing and maintaining diverse revenue portfolios that fuel both capital projects and daily operations. District leaders gained practical insights into constructing resilient financial frameworks that sustain infrastructure, operations, programs, and strategic growth. Though districts operate under varying constraints, the group addressed the universal challenge head-on: transforming dependency on temporary grants and goodwill into robust, sustainable fiscal foundations that can endure economic fluctuations and drive lasting impact.



Here are five takeaways

1.

Diversified revenue streams are crucial to ensure long-term sustainability. Real estate offers a foundational income source, with some districts reinvesting proceeds into endowments. Service-based models, like University City District (UCD), demonstrate how workforce development and safety programs generate income while meeting stakeholder needs. Partnerships with corporations and private foundations help districts build sector-specific expertise and employment pipelines. Commercialization of university research, as seen in Australian districts, fuels revenue through equity stakes and spinouts. Finally, districts use storytelling to attract investment, highlighting the need for a layered, well-communicated model.

2.

Building trust and demonstrating value to anchor institutions is key for securing voluntary contributions. Because many anchor institutions, such as universities and hospitals, do not pay property taxes, their contributions are typically voluntary, making trust and clear value propositions essential. Districts like UCD have succeeded by proactively addressing anchor needs through services and programs, not just by asking for support. Effective strategies include asking institutions what they need, identifying shared challenges, and offering practical solutions. Multi-year agreements, adjusted for inflation, offer stability and predictability, replacing the uncertainty of annual funding cycles.

3.

Flexibility in space and programming is important to adapt to changing needs post-pandemic. Innovation districts must now operate in a landscape transformed by hybrid work, shifting research priorities, and evolving tenant expectations. Many leaders shared how they've redesigned spaces to be "super flexible," accommodating a wide range of uses from office work to clinical services. Programming also requires continuous recalibration, offering services and engagement opportunities that align with current community and institutional needs.

4.

Leadership engagement and governance structure significantly impact district success and sustainability. Strong governance, particularly with active involvement from senior leaders at anchor institutions, is critical to a district's long-term success. Boards composed of presidents, Chief Operating Officers, Chief Financial Officers, and academic deans ensure alignment between district priorities and institutional agendas. Conversely, leadership turnover or weak governance structures can destabilize districts, leading to gradual disengagement that may go unnoticed until it's too late.

5.

Districts must position themselves strategically for emerging technologies like AI while remaining resilient to economic changes. The rise of AI and other transformative technologies presents both risks and opportunities for innovation districts. Flexibility, diversification, and political adaptability are key to resilience, especially in regions where federal support may fluctuate. Districts with dedicated innovation organizations and strong ties to local and state governments demonstrated greater agility during the pandemic and other disruptions, highlighting the importance of broad-based support networks in an unpredictable economic landscape.

Active Placemaking

Speakers:

- **Nate Hommel**, Director of Planning and Design, University City District
- **Sean Luther**, President & CEO, Innovate PGH

This workshop was a walk-through of design principles, placemaking approaches, and activities that create a sense of place in districts. Active placemaking emerges as a transformative strategy for reimagining urban innovation spaces, moving beyond static physical design to create dynamic, responsive environments that invite participation, spark spontaneous interactions, and continuously evolve with community needs. Nate led participants on a walking tour of sites in the Monterrey Innovation District to explore how public spaces can be transformed through observation, ideation, and prioritization exercises. The session focused on low-cost, high-impact interventions and community-driven design strategies to activate spaces, foster engagement, and support collaboration in the era of flexible work and distributed innovation.

Here are five takeaways

1.

Start with non-permanent interventions. Using "non-permanent" projects is an effective way to test ideas, build community support, and demonstrate value before investing in permanent infrastructure. This approach allows for experimentation and iteration based on community feedback.

2.

Small investments can lead to big changes. Using "$500,000" as his "magic number," Nate Hommel, Director of Planning and Design, University City District demonstrated how relatively small investments in public spaces can transform underutilized areas, create community gathering spots, and eventually lead to larger permanent investments like Amtrak's redevelopment of the station plaza in Philadelphia.

3.

Public space maintenance can serve as a strategic workforce development tool. Rather than hiring suburban landscape companies, University City District created a landscape social enterprise that trains people from "deep cyclical poverty" to maintain public spaces. This approach not only maintains the spaces but also provides job skills and keeps money circulating in the local community, making maintenance an investment in "human capital" rather than just a cost.

4.

Use data to tell your story. Collecting data on how people use spaces through tools like Placer AI and cell phone tracking helps demonstrate impact to potential funders and builds the case for future investment in public spaces.

5.

Innovation districts need early activation. Creating welcoming public spaces from the outset helps innovation districts build community engagement, rather than waiting years for permanent infrastructure. This approach helps residents feel invited and connected to these new developments.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Advancing Shared Prosperity

Speakers:

- **Lorena Guillé-Laris,** Executive Director, Fundación FEMSA
- **Pamela Puchalski,** Vice President & Co-Founder, GIID
- **Kyria Stephens,** President & CEO, Intersect Buffalo
- **Stacey Weismiller,** Interim Director, US Center for Advanced Manufacturing

This workshop explored how innovation districts can intentionally advance shared prosperity, ensuring broader access to opportunity, deeper community integration, and more inclusive outcomes across research, job creation and upskilling, and entrepreneurship. During the session, speakers explored practical efforts to create inclusive innovation economies: partnerships between civic actors and universities in Monterrey, vocational pathways in advanced manufacturing, and inclusive innovation models.

Here are five takeaways

1.

Complex problems demand collaborative, systemic, and locally grounded solutions. Addressing prosperity in innovation districts requires embracing complexity, not just applying simple or linear solutions. Collaborative leadership, systems thinking, and context-aware experimentation are key. Concrete examples like Monterrey's 2050 Water Plan, circular economy projects, and early childhood initiatives show how place-based, multi-stakeholder innovation can yield tangible, inclusive outcomes. It's crucial to "elevate the quality of relationships" with communities, design with future generations in mind, and see "constellations where others see stars."

2.

Inclusive growth doesn't happen by accident; it must be intentionally built into innovation ecosystems. The Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus (BNMC) successfully turned a struggling post-industrial neighborhood into a thriving innovation district, growing from 5,000 to over 17,000 jobs. But in early phases, large portions of the community, particularly predominantly Black, low-income neighborhoods, were not included due to structural silos and a lack of proactive connection-building. The BNMC team later recognized that innovation and economic development must be coupled with deliberate inclusion strategies, from hiring practices and procurement to physical and social integration.

3.

Industrial development must be reimagined as a driver of inclusive economic prosperity, not just job creation. Industry and manufacturing have historically shaped the economic foundation of communities, providing financial stability yet also limiting opportunities for full participation in the economic benefits of innovation. In districts where manufacturing is the anchor, there must also be investment in strong community infrastructure (housing, healthcare, schools, and mobility) to create equitable prosperity--this means industry needs to also invest in the ecosystems around factories.

4.

Trust-building and clear accountability are both critical for collaboration. Long-term trust and alignment of shared purpose are essential, especially when working within large organizations or across sectors. Relationships and shared goals need stewarding and investment of time and energy.

Yet trust alone isn't sufficient; what's needed is formalized accountability. Success can come from "getting it on paper", assigning explicit roles, timelines, and commitments to move beyond relational capital into execution.

5.

Motivation must be rooted in urgency but grounded in purpose. Motivating action requires a sense of urgency, but "goodness" and "care" need to be just as active and strategic, driving people to action through purposeful, collective vision, not just hope or values. Leading with fear can be counterproductive, whereas mobilizing through positive, constructive strategies, like philanthropic action or community competitions, can generate momentum while preserving emotional well-being.

Developing a District's Unique Value Proposition

Speakers:

- **Rachel Edwards,** Workplace Futures Lead, Lendlease
- **Jason Kaplan,** Associate Vice President of Operations, Innovation Quarter
- **Tom Osha,** Board Chair, GIID; Executive Vice President, Wexford Science + Technology
- **Chad Shearer,** Director of Research, GIID
- **Mariella Smids,** Director Precincts, Monash University

This session explored how innovation districts can define and activate their unique value proposition (UVP)—the core combination of R&D strengths, distinctive assets, and strategic positioning that define their relevance and impact.

Rather than relying on generic economic development formulas, panelists argued that districts must differentiate by leveraging what is distinctively theirs: from institutional strengths and anchor partnerships to social equity, cultural heritage, and emerging industries. The conversation focused on the cruciality of a district's UVP and how articulating it effectively can align internal and external stakeholders, guide investment, and shape governance.

Here are five takeaways

1.

The authenticity of a district's UVP is key and the most compelling UVPs grow from a district's real, place-based strengths—be they a concentration of specialized research, a unique urban history, or deeply rooted community needs. Rather than blindly following models from Boston or Silicon Valley, districts should instead ask: What is our unique combination of institutions, people, and history that no one else has?

2.

A district's narrative is a strategic tool that can be used. Crafting a UVP means shaping a shared narrative that people—from residents and researchers to investors—can understand and believe in. "Narrative is infrastructure": it aligns diverse stakeholders, guides investment decisions, and communicates a district's mission to the world. Without a clear story, even the best-built districts struggle to attract attention and trust.

3.

Equity is an innovation asset and a key tenant of a UVP. Several districts are actively embedding equity and inclusion into their UVPs—not as side programs, but as core features. This can include reserving space and support for minority-owned retail and restaurants, co-designing with local communities, and anchoring Diversity, Equity and Inclusion into workforce programs. These actions not only create social value but distinguish the district in a crowded field.

4.

Scale helps, but keeping the focus on niche capabilities matters more. Large-scale developments can amplify a UVP, but scale alone doesn't generate value. One district built its UVP by being highly focused: leveraging a niche set of partnerships and research capabilities to drive results. The challenge is not to be everything, but to clearly define what you do best and build around that—with physical, programmatic, and policy alignment.

5.

Trending technologies can be a trap without mission alignment – it is important to focus on why a district is unique. The dominance of life sciences in many districts can be criticized as an example of default thinking. While lucrative, it may not align with local capacity or community relevance. Instead, districts should consider where their innovation capacity intersects with social and environmental needs—whether in fashion, food systems, mobility, or tech-enabled public health.


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Designing Capital Strategies for Startups

Speakers:

- **Juan Bringas,** Director of Investments & Technological Innovation, Gobierno del Municipio de Monterrey
- **Rogelio De los Santos,** Founder & Managing Partner, Dalus Capital
- **Ilse Treurnicht,** Managing Partner, TwinRiver Capital and former CEO of MaRS Discovery District
- **Julie Wagner,** President & Co-Founder, GIID

The session explored how startups can effectively approach capital raising within innovation districts, emphasizing both traditional and non-traditional funding mechanisms.

The discussion centered around the importance of aligning capital strategies with a startup's stage of growth, the role of place-based investment, and the need for inclusive and equitable capital access. Panelists shared insights into how innovation districts can act as catalysts for entrepreneurial ecosystems by providing not only access to funding but also to networks, mentorship, and infrastructure. The discussion also covered creative financing tools, the significance of storytelling in pitching, and the evolving expectations of venture capital in terms of impact and inclusion.

Here are five takeaways

1.

Capital must align with business stage vision—startups should match their capital strategies with their specific growth stage. Early-stage companies might look to angel investors or grants, while scaling firms may pursue venture capital. Not all capital is equal—startups should be selective to ensure alignment with their mission and long-term goals.

2.

Innovation districts operate as financial, physical and social infrastructure simultaneously. Innovation districts offer more than funding—they create access to valuable networks, mentorship, pilot opportunities, and visibility. These ecosystems support startups in building credibility and connections essential for raising capital.

3.

Creative and inclusive capital mechanisms are critical, and traditional VC models often miss underrepresented founders. Alternative structures like revenue-based financing, community investment funds, and catalytic capital can fill gaps and promote equity.

4.

Storytelling is a strategic asset in fundraising. Investors are not just buying into a product—they're buying into a vision. Founders need to clearly articulate their purpose, impact, and scalability through compelling storytelling to differentiate themselves in a crowded market.

5.

Investors are increasingly impact-focused. There is a growing trend of investors prioritizing social impact, community outcomes, and inclusive growth. Startups that demonstrate both financial viability and social return are better positioned in today's funding environment.

The Global Institute on Innovation Districts thanks the Summit partners who made the inaugural Global Summit a resounding success.

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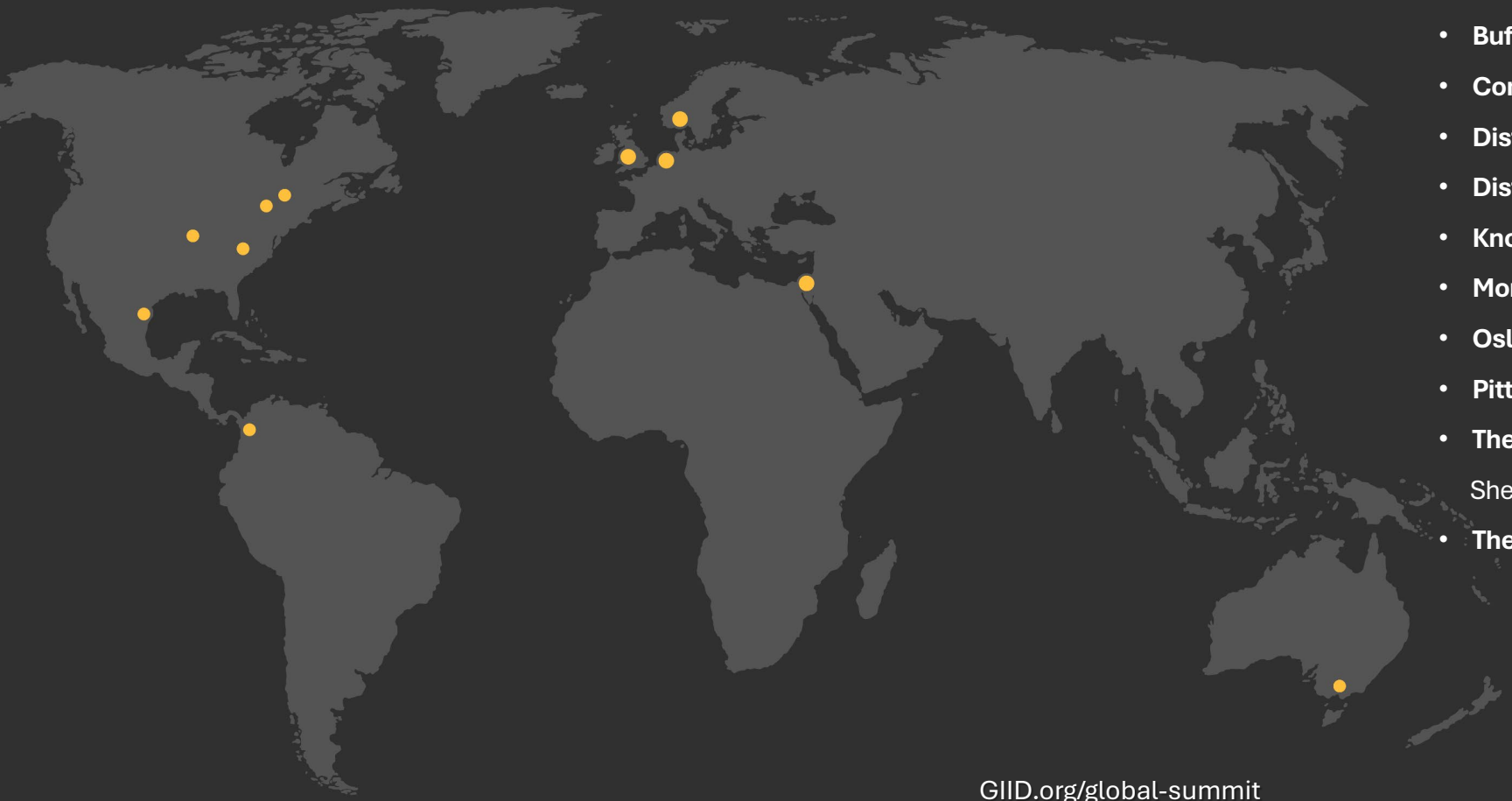
The Global Institute on Innovation Districts also thanks its Steering Committee for their commitment to advancing the paradigm and practice of innovation districts



- **Be'er Sheva Innovation District** in Israel
- **Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus** in New York, USA
- **Cortex Innovation District** in St. Louis, USA
- **Distrito de Innovación de Medellín** in Colombia
- **Distrito Innovación Monterrey** in Mexico
- **Knowledge District Zuidas** in Amsterdam, The Netherlands
- **Monash Technology Precinct** in Melbourne, Australia
- **Oslo Science City** in Norway
- **Pittsburgh Innovation District** in Pennsylvania, USA
- **The Advanced Manufacturing Innovation District** in Sheffield and Rotherham, UK
- **The Innovation Quarter** in Winston-Salem, USA

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