

# THE GLOBAL NETWORK OF INNOVATION DISTRICTS

A PATHWAY TO REALIZING THEIR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL POTENTIAL

## I. INTRODUCTION

In January 2022, The Global Institute on Innovation Districts will launch a Global Network of Innovation Districts (Global Network). The Global Network will accelerate the growth of innovation districts—individually and collectively—through first-of-its-kind empirical analysis, peer learning, and technical support for implementing new strategies and initiatives in districts and their communities.

In a world plagued by infectious diseases and cancer, climate change, sprawling development, and increasing economic inequality, innovation districts are actively organizing to take on these and other urgent challenges to create a multiplier of growth on the economy. This ambition powerfully dovetails with global investment trends, which signal that there has been, and will continue

to be, increased investment in multidisciplinary research, startup activity, and R&D to address specific challenges.

To attract investment while creating a multiplier of growth, innovation districts will need to demonstrate organized leadership, clarify their unique R&D strengths, leverage their hard assets, and demonstrate capabilities in innovation and commercialization processes.

For these reasons, the Global Network *will be more than just another network.*

“*The Global Network will be a select group of districts ambitiously seeking to be “best in class,” re-enforcing their individual and collective efforts to drive new waves of economic competitiveness and an inclusive recovery.*”



## II. THE GLOBAL NETWORK MODEL

The power of innovation districts lies in their unique attributes and capabilities. There is no singular strategy or playbook for realizing an innovation district's potential. For traditional networks, the distinctiveness of districts makes it difficult to address specific challenges or opportunities as well as solve highly individualized problems. The Global Institute has developed a tailored approach, whereby working with a Global Network for a minimum of two years, participating innovation districts will engage in the following set of activities below:

### ROBUST EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

The Global Institute's focus on research—deep empirical analysis of each district—is a fundamental step to understanding an innovation district's specific challenges and leveraging its unique strengths. At the same time, robust analysis across the large number of districts in the Global Network will allow The Global Institute to better distinguish the unique R&D strengths among innovation districts. This sort of analysis will address concerns raised by governments and other investors that districts' declared R&D strengths are neither unique nor supported by sufficient evidence.

To address these concerns and advance its own top-level research, The Global Institute will identify the unique strengths of individual districts in addition to their areas of underperformance, their critical mass of mixed-use activities, and their efforts to create quality of place. Comparative analyses across districts will help develop the evidence necessary to benchmark and define new innovation district typologies. Other areas of focus, to be further defined by participants of the Global Network, could include the development of ecosystem and community builders, processes for increasing inclusivity, organizing for success, and techniques for implementing process innovations.

### TAILORED PEER LEARNING SESSIONS

Informed by its empirical research, The Global Institute will divide the Global Network into cohorts of innovation districts that share similar characteristics and face similar specific challenges or opportunities. Sessions of these smaller peer groups will be informed by data, allowing leaders in innovation districts to better understand their similarities and differences and to develop strategies that fit their unique needs and circumstances. To ensure that the Global Network also remains a larger collective community, districts will participate in larger sessions to learn about emerging models and best practices. Examples of topics that could be covered are leadership models, governance, sustainable financing, strengthening critical mass, and deeper discussions on inclusive innovation.

### STRATEGIC GUIDANCE TO ADVANCE THE PRACTICE

Continuing to work in smaller, curated groups, innovation districts will transform strategies into concrete solutions and tactics. Supported by The Global Institute and their peers, each innovation district will develop and implement new products or processes to strengthen and accelerate their growth. Through these activities, participants of the Global Network will be able to tap The Global Institute's thought leadership and network of experts, as well as the experience of more mature districts to implement new strategies and solutions.

### STRATEGIES TO INCREASE VISIBILITY AND RECOGNITION

An important benefit of the Global Network is that districts will form the basis for The Global Institute's empirically rich research. Districts will be highlighted in future publications on the rise and evolution of districts, expanding their global reach and exposure. The Global Institute will also increase the visibility of districts through public information and branding strategies.

● *Participating districts will receive rigorous **data-driven information and analysis** of their own district and comparative analysis across districts. Work products will come in the form of charts, diagrams, tables, and maps.*

● *Districts will receive peer session summaries, briefs summarizing key insights by theme, and case studies documenting powerful practice. Districts will have the opportunity to participate in site visits that The Global Institute may organize for an additional fee.*

● *With the support of strategic advisors, districts will **formulate detailed strategies and products to advance their work**. Such products may include investment prospectuses, changes to master plans, and changes to how the district is governed.*

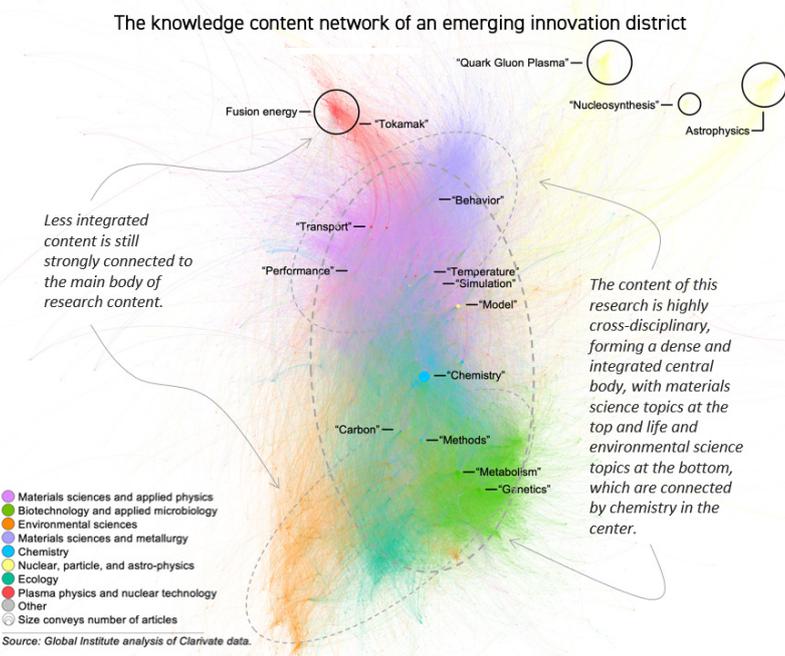
● *Districts will be highlighted in future publications, their name and profile will be on the website of the Global Institute, and districts may publish The Global Institute's Network logo on their website.*

### III. THE GLOBAL INSTITUTE IS WELL POSITIONED TO ADVANCE THE PRACTICE THROUGH THE GLOBAL NETWORK

The Global Institute is a not-for-profit organization with global reach that provides independent, practice-oriented research and thought leadership on innovation districts—place-based geographies of innovation that leverage the attributes of density, proximity, and accessibility. The Global Institute is well positioned to create a robust network for the following reasons:

- The Institute has deep experience advancing the paradigm and practice of innovation districts worldwide.** The Global Institute's leadership—its team, board, and strategic advisors—are globally recognized for elevating innovation districts as place-based models of innovation emerging in cities around the world. As authors of "The Rise of Innovation Districts" and "The Evolution of Innovation Districts," The Global Institute's leadership captured and codified insights into this rapidly evolving practice. The leadership team includes some of the strongest strategic thinkers and practitioners in the field—including key district leaders—who have dedicated many years to advancing innovation districts around the world. Participants of the Global Network, as part of the deliberate process of problem solving and solution building, will have access to these thought leaders.
- The Institute has the capacity to conduct advanced empirical research, providing districts with fact-based insights.** Building on work its leadership originally developed while at the Brookings Institution, The Global Institute delivers cutting-edge research and insights that have informed innovation district strategies around the world. In 2020, deep empirical analysis of nine innovation districts representing The Global Institute's Steering Committee spanned R&D strengths and specializations, ecosystem-building intermediaries, place-based strategies and assets, the diversity and geographic reach of social networks, and how districts are organized for success. Since 2020, additional research engagements with emerging innovation districts have led The Global Institute to conduct even more powerful cross-cutting analyses to identify districts' R&D strengths and opportunities. The Global Institute is now able to evaluate the unique R&D strengths and roles of an innovation district in its regional innovation ecosystem, revealing the intricate relationships and networks shared by institutions, companies, startups, and leading researchers. In other words, The Global Institute possesses the research prowess to help districts see and better understand their own evolving ecosystem.
- The Institute has experience designing and leading a global network of districts.** The Global Network builds on a ten-month interim network established to provide a safe forum for districts during the height of the pandemic. Working with twelve carefully selected districts from around the world, The Global Institute organized a series of activities to support districts. The chart on the following page summarizes the activities completed during this period.

#### GIID ANALYSIS REVEALS THE CONNECTIONS THAT UNDERGIRD R&D STRENGTHS



## Network Activity

A baseline survey districts completed to catalogue their specific innovation, place, and organizational assets

A 1.5-hour Direct Strategy Session with each individual district, led by The Global Institute's senior team, to discuss and advance district priorities

Large Peer Session titled "Uncovering the Strengths and Complexities of Innovation Districts: GIID Research on Nine Innovation Districts," which was an overview of The Global Institute's analysis of nine innovation districts, completed in 2020

Large Peer Session titled "A Multistakeholder Governance Model"

Large Peer Session titled "Investing in Startups"

Large Peer Session titled "Advancing Inclusive Innovation and Innovative Inclusion"

Large Peer Session titled "Positioning Districts as Engines for Post Pandemic Recovery"

Small Peer Session titled "The Fate of 'Creative Collisions,' Collaborative Innovation, and Cross-Pollination among District Actors"

Small Peer Session titled "Tailored Support for Startups"

A positioning survey whereby individual districts identified how they have changed since the start of the global pandemic. This information is now visually displayed in maps on the website of The Global Institute.

During a recent evaluation of the interim network, network participants helped identify important aspects of the work that should be continued by the Global Network. These aspects included the following:

- **Ensuring that The Global Institute continues to provide insights derived from its independent, research and work on-the-ground in districts.**

"What I find really valuable in your network, which is different from other networks, is your knowledge of the content. You don't just exchange ideas, you add value by sharing your content and analysis. That is due to your history and your professional [track record]. I appreciate that a lot."

—Alberto Mina, MIND, Milan, Italy

"The Peer Learning Session on GIID's research was like an explosion of ideas and insights, such as different types and examples of innovation districts based on different [dimensions]. I think that is really powerful. It's like a guide to follow best practice."

—Edgar Muñoz, DistritoTec, Monterrey, Mexico

- **Providing meaningful connections between districts around the world.**

"The Global Institute is unique globally... It is only through The Global Institute that I started to engage others with whom I then had calls and chats. It's from those people where I really get my inspiration."

—Philipp Dautel, Tonsley Innovation District, Adelaide, Australia

"It was very interesting to talk to different districts that are in different parts of their life cycle because it both gives you a sense of what's possible and things to aspire to.... It helps build momentum in our own work."

—Ben Vivekanandan, Monash Technology Precinct, Victoria, Australia

- **Carving out space and time to develop strategies and solutions.**

"[The Direct Strategy Session] was itself illuminating.... It felt like the right discussion at the right time."

—Prakash Surapaneni, MaRS Discovery District, Toronto, ON, Canada

"The Direct Strategy Session was really important. Having someone who can push back and be honest with us allowed us to pivot at a time when we needed to make some major decisions. It pushed us through this moment in a good way."

—Lillian Kuri, Cleveland Health-Tech Corridor, Cleveland, Ohio, USA

## IV. COMMITMENT AND COSTS

As advancing innovation districts requires a collaborative approach, districts will need to identify the following individuals to work with The Global Institute:

- A *district leader* with decision-making authority who can provide oversight, management, and strategic direction for the innovation district's activities conducted as part of the Global Network.
- A *district facilitator* to serve as a day-to-day point person, gather and provide access to data, deliver critical communications, and support Global Network activities, including identifying and inviting district practitioners to participate in sessions.
- *Practitioners* in leadership or support roles related to the district's operations or development who can share insights and lessons with peers, provide access to data, and engage in collective problem solving with practitioners in other innovation districts in the network.

**To conclude, The Global Network of Innovation Districts will be a powerful pathway for districts to realize their economic and social potential. Shaped by rigorous analysis and thought leader insights, districts will work together to design new strategies and solutions that help them leapfrog ahead. At the same time, The Global Institute will help codify and scale insights about this emerging, but rapidly evolving model—positioning districts as a unique sub-metropolitan/sub-urban geography worthy of investment. Finally, our collective efforts will generate new arguments for why districts are a strategic approach for building a more competitive, sustainable and inclusive economy.**

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Generous support to advance independent research and the Global Network is provided by our Founding Partners: **Lendlease**, a global property and infrastructure group and **Ventas**, a real estate investment trust. The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of Lendlease and Ventas. The Global Institute would also like to acknowledge the innovation districts serving on our **Steering Committee**: The Advanced Manufacturing Innovation District in Sheffield and Rotherham; Be'er Sheva Innovation District; Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus in New York; Cortex Innovation Community in St. Louis; Distrito de Innovación de Medellín; Knowledge District Zuidas in Amsterdam; Melbourne Innovation Districts, City North; Pittsburgh Innovation District; and the Innovation Quarter in Winston-Salem.