Introduction: Realizing the Potential of the Tech Economy as a Driver of Equitable Growth

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The City of Pittsburgh is quickly becoming recognized as an international hub of innovation and technological development. From biomedical advances to integrated building systems to robotics, Pittsburgh is leapfrogging more established tech hubs to emerge as a dynamic, agile new player in the landscape with still-untapped opportunities to explore. We are fortunate to have a network of strong institutional actors, philanthropic organizations, industry leaders, and nascent start-ups that are driving this evolution towards a growing and resilient economy based on education, technology, healthcare, and related support-services. This solid foundation of local talent and energy is one of our greatest strengths and is one of the key opportunities I see for city government to become more engaged and help to develop coordinated and deliberate strategies to capitalize on and facilitate even faster and more sustainable growth in key industries. It also presents a unique opportunity to seek partnerships that will enhance the delivery of city services and improve internal operations using homegrown technology and know-how.

One of the reasons I ran for mayor is that I did not want this opportunity to slip through our fingers. I am determined to make sure that we harness this energy for the betterment of all of our residents and as an attraction engine to grow our population again and repair the damage of the industrial collapse decades past. Key to this strategy, though, must be a vigorous focus on equity. If the tech and innovation economy only serves to enrich one segment of our population, we will all have failed. We must ensure that as this economy grows, we are creating opportunity not just for those with PhDs but for those with GEDs as well. This new economy can be a powerful driver of neighborhood redevelopment, job creation, educational advances, and improvements to city government, and it is my job to ensure that this potential is realized. There are three key ways that my administration is working to achieve this goal: creating new partnerships, borrowing from what works, and planning for the future.

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For years now, Pittsburgh's emerging tech and innovation economy has been chugging away without much involvement from city government; but we have reached a point where the city's partnership and participation are crucial to realizing the sector's full potential in the economy. Recognizing that, my team has been working hard to build partnerships and offer the city's support as a connector, a facilitator, and an implementer. As a first step, the city's newly created Department of Innovation and Performance organized five roundtable sessions this summer to bring together players in the new economy and seek feedback as to how the city could better support them. These roundtables focused on key sectors of the economy—clean technology, startups, the maker movement, venture capital and investment, and accelerators and coworking spaces—and they brought together industry leaders, funders, start-ups, and university partners, many of whom had not previously had the opportunity to meet and discuss their work. A key thread that ran throughout these sessions was how to ensure that as these industries develop, there are opportunities created for all people in all neighborhoods of the city—a truly equitable approach.

We have also worked to build and strengthen partnerships with the University of Pittsburgh and Carnegie Mellon University to help us evaluate city systems and processes and explore ways to reform them to make them more efficient from an operations perspective and more effective from a citizen's perspective. One of the key initiatives that has come out of this new partnership is the city's push to open up all of our public data and share it with citizens, community groups, application developers, and anyone else who has an interest. Through this partnership, not only will the city's data become freely available but we are also creating structures to allow other municipalities, non-profit organizations, and the universities themselves to share data and data analysis capabilities. When launched, this regional data portal will be among the first of its kind in the world and will become a powerful tool for broad-based analysis at a regional scale supporting the growth of existing efforts both non-profit and for-profit and the development of new ones.

Finally, we are excited to begin a new partnership with Code for America, a San Francisco-based non-profit organization that places technologists, application developers, and designers with cities chosen through a competitive process in order to work on key service delivery issues and develop a citizen-facing application to address them. Pittsburgh will be welcoming our CfA fellows in February 2015 to work with us to reform our procurement system, opening the doors of city government to smaller, neighborhood-scale businesses and service providers who haven't been able to compete for city work in the past.

BORROWING FROM WHAT WORKS

The City of Pittsburgh is certainly not the first to seek a greater role in the development of the tech and innovation economy, and we have been able to use that to our advantage by learning from the efforts of other cities around the country and the world. My team and I have been able to visit places like San Francisco, Boston, Chicago, and Stockholm to meet directly with the governing bodies of innovation clusters, with Chief Innovation Officers and Data Officers, with industry leaders, and others who have provided us with insights from their experiences. What we've learned is that Pittsburgh is perfectly positioned to exponentially grow our tech and innovation sectors with a bit of coordination, a deliberate strategy, and leadership from city government—and we've learned that successful models already exist.

We've also learned from cities that are working hard to close the digital divide and open up opportunity in these industries to all of their residents. City-supported organizations like the Smart Chicago Collaborative, for example, are directly engaging low- and moderate-income workers in the tech sector, in their own neighborhoods, and aggressively working to address the digital divide through education, services, and low-cost or free-of-cost Internet access programs. Pittsburgh is unique, but that doesn't mean we can't borrow a bit from what's working elsewhere.

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

The City of Pittsburgh has never before crafted a strategic plan to comprehensively address our internal technology needs and opportunities—and those of the broader tech and innovation sector. That is why Debra Lam, the city's Chief of Innovation and Performance, and her team in the Department of Innovation and Performance have launched an Innovation Roadmap to begin to craft an inventory of needs and an implementation plan that will carry through my term in office. The Roadmap is a collaborative effort which includes the outcomes from the five roundtables, ideas and feedback from our study tours of other cities, citizen-generated ideas and comments collected via online tools, and discussions with city officials and employees at all levels.

Through this planning initiative we are exploring some big ideas that we believe will have dramatic impacts on our city, including the development of municipal broadband infrastructure, the digitization of dozens of city services and processes, the creation of new programs to steer start-ups towards affordable space in struggling and emerging business districts, the implementation of open data and civic technology projects, the creation and support of digital literacy programming with partners like the Carnegie Library, and more.

I N T R O D U C T I O N

I truly believe that the tech and innovation boom occurring in Pittsburgh right now is a once in a lifetime opportunity that we as city government must participate in fully in order for all of our residents to realize its benefits. Luckily we have strong partners from every sector who want to work together to see these ideas become reality, putting Pittsburgh on the map as an international hub of technology and innovation that is growing sustainably and equitably into the 21st century.