
❖ CONVERSATIONS ❖

■ Research parks: partnership brings promise of high-tech jobs, tremendous economic impact

"It will take time. It's not something that's going to happen overnight. And it usually takes about five to 10 years to get a substantial amount of business partners to come into the research park."

That's what Teresa McKnight, CEO and executive director of the South Dakota State University Innovation Campus, says when she advises patience when looking to the promise of the research park headed for the Brookings area. Born and raised in Utah, she came to the job from the directorship of the Utah State University Innovation Campus. She serves on the 15-member board of directors of the Association of University Research Parks.

Today she talks with The Brookings Register about jobs, economic development, and the wealth that a research park can bring to a community and state.

Q: In simple terms, what is the Innovation Campus?

A: The Innovation Campus is referenced as a public-private partnership where high-tech companies or R and D (research and development) companies locate. You could be a company that is spinout from research, so they transfer the technology out of the university; or you could be a company that creates technologies or is involved in research that wants to be located right next door to the university, so they can partner with other faculty and other researchers.

And it's also a place that creates hands-on, real-world application environments for students. They sit in class and they learn theory, and then they have an opportunity to go work for a company that might be an engineering R and D company in which they are able to apply what they learn.

Q: What did you use as your model? I'm assuming that other universities throughout the country have probably used concepts similar to this.

A: Yes, they have. There are several hundred research parks around the United States, and I believe the dollar amount was \$21 billion.



Teresa McKnight

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that these research parks actually contributed to the economy of the nation.

They are a big factor in stimulating what they call "knowledge-based economic development."

Q: What are we looking at for a timeline here at SDSU?

A: As a research park, you would love to snap your fingers and say that it would become automatically successful overnight; but it doesn't work that way. And when I say that, that's not to be viewed in a negative way at all.

What I'm saying is that it takes time to be able to develop a research park, to make sure that No. 1, we're doing things correctly; that when we look at the underground infrastructure that we are laying it out in the ground correctly and that the lines, all utilities, data, the band width, everything is being put in and installed correctly.

Also, how we are going to strategically place the buildings, so that as different companies come in, we cluster the types of R and D they're involved in. So you'll have clusters of engineering, R and D, and technology companies. You'll have clusters of bio-companies, ... of ag research, ... of software and hardware development companies.

Companies seem to do better when they are in the midst of a cluster where synergy and interaction and partnership are easily attained rather than being on one corner of the research park versus the other corner.

Q: Where does funding for a project of this magnitude ordinarily come from?

A: Funding for this type of a project comes from multiple resources. You have federal funding that's available, not a lot of federal funding; but you have some, and I have to reiterate that every little bit helps. And then you have cities and counties and states that put money into these projects.

Because we need to remember, this is the state of South Dakota's first research park. And it can be a model for other research parks that will be created around the state as well.

Q: In your recent report to the Brookings City

Council, you indicated there were three, what you called, "anchor tenants." Are those tenants locked into the research park?

A: It is not official yet. It is a work in progress. We are negotiating with these companies right now to get everything to fit together for them to be able to make that final commitment to come into the innovation campus.

Q: Would it be fair to say that to make a project of this magnitude work there has to be dedicated partnership? In this instance, it looks like to make it a go this has to be a partnership involving SDSU, Brookings County, the City of Brookings, and then also private enterprise?

A: Correct. Absolutely. It's those partners that are critical in a research park's success, because a university cannot create a research park and grow and develop a research park on its own.

It takes all of the partners sitting around the table making it happen. And I will say that the (SDSU) Growth Partnership has done a fantastic job in getting all the key players around the table; and they serve on the board.

I mean, these are business leaders that know how to make things happen in Brookings. It's the city and county that's willing to make the investment, because of the increase in employment opportunities and wealth creation. We talked about job creation. Job creation's important to any area, but wealth creation is also important.

Because, do we want to create lots and lots of jobs at minimum wage, or do we want to create high-tech, high-paying jobs? And that's what research parks are able to do.

Q: It sounds like for all the partners involved, there is the potential for some very positive economic impact.

A: Absolutely. There is tremendous economic impact. And that's the reason why all of the partners around the table have decided to take this step to advance Brookings to the next level, in the creation of a research park. Because they know and they've seen models all across the United States of what happens when you build a university research park, what it does to the area.

— Compiled by John Kubal