METROLAB NETWORK
STRATEGIC PLAN
2020-2022

Enabling Data & Tech Transformation + Driving Evidence-Based, Research-Informed Policy

By Redefining the City-University Partnership, and Supporting

The Civic Research & Innovation Ecosystem + MetroLab Members' Projects, Partnerships, and Students

Released February 2020

Introduction

We enthusiastically share this Strategic Plan for MetroLab Network, which serves as a blueprint for our objectives and plans during the period 2020 to 2022.

These activities come at an exciting time for MetroLab, as the organization introduces a formalized membership program and launches new programming in partnership with federal stakeholders. This plan builds upon the community that MetroLab has cultivated over the past four years, a rich ecosystem of academics, policymakers, and partners focused on civic research and innovation.

We hope this document offers a window into the impact that MetroLab can have on your institutions and communities.

Sincerely,

Bill Fulton, Rice University, Director of the Kinder Institute, MetroLab Board Chair
Lisa Camp, Chief of Staff, Office of Provost, Case Western Reserve University, MetroLab Board
Daniel Correa, Director of Day One Project, Federation of American Scientists, MetroLab Board
Santiago Garces, Director of Innovation and Performance, City of Pittsburgh, MetroLab Board
Debra Lam, Managing Director of Smart Cities & Inclusive Innovation, Georgia Institute of Technology, MetroLab Board
Karen Lightman, Executive Director of Metro21: Smart Cities Inst. at Carnegie Mellon University, MetroLab Board
Michael Mattmiller, Director, Government Affairs at Microsoft, MetroLab Board
Ben Levine, Executive Director MetroLab Network

About MetroLab Network

MetroLab Network is an international collaborative of 27 cities, 6 counties, and 34 universities focused on civic research and innovation.

- We cultivate **partnerships between universities and local governments** to drive research-informed, evidence-based policy and enable data and technology transformation.

- We foster a **peer network** of stakeholders from academia and local government that constitute an applied, interdisciplinary field of research and practice.

- We connect to an **ecosystem of federal, philanthropic, and civic partners** with a shared interest in the promise of civic research and innovation.

MetroLab was launched jointly by 40 mayors and university leaders as part of the White House Smart Cities Initiative in 2015. In 2019, with strong support from the universities and local governments that were involved, and with a proven track-record with funders and partners, MetroLab moved forward with its next phase. That phase included a spin-out from Carnegie Mellon University, which served as MetroLab's fiscal sponsor since its launch, to an independent 501c-3 organization. It also included a call for the university-local government members to invest in the organization, to offer funding that will enable MetroLab to reach its full potential, including an emerging portfolio of member-oriented activities and partnerships with key stakeholders like the National Science Foundation.

Our Philosophy

We believe that **data- and technology-oriented civic research and innovation** will lead to more effective, targeted, adaptive, and creative government and community services, improving social services, mobility options, urban spaces, public health, and more. It will enable sustainability goals and climate resilience. It will foster trust in government, train the next generation of the public workforce, and cultivate a civic-minded public. It will enable responsible and transparent applications of data and technology in government.

Our Stakeholders

MetroLab strengthens the work of its **university** and **local government** members by cultivating a dynamic peer network - aimed at sharing best practices, scaling research and deployment projects, and building data- and technology-oriented civic research as an academic field. It connects that community to a range of stakeholders in the civic research and innovation ecosystem, including **federal agencies** and **philanthropic**, **corporate**, **nonprofit**, and **civic organizations**.

Our Work

MetroLab's work is oriented around three pillars, outlined below:

INSTITUTIONALIZED PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN UNIVERSITIES & LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Rationale

- Partnerships between universities and local governments are compelling mechanisms to quickly target and deploy research on high-need priorities that manifest at the local level.
- Faculty and students research and deploy "living lab" approaches to societal priorities, enabling rich exploration of social and technical sciences.
- Universities bring capacity and creativity to local government and help enable digital and technological transformation and evidence-based, research-informed policy.

MetroLab Role

- Gather and disseminate best practices for partnerships.
- Identify successful tools and approaches developed by members and create templates that allow such approaches to scale.
- Highlight successful projects and partnerships through media partnerships and case studies.
- Develop partnerships with funders from government, philanthropy, and industry to support work underway between university and local government partners.

PEER NETWORK OF ACADEMICS, STUDENTS, AND POLICYMAKERS

- Data- and technology-oriented partnerships between universities and local government are a relatively new phenomenon, and stakeholders can draw lessons from peers related to organization, funding, and project deployment.
- These partnerships are addressing common priorities globally, and teams can connect to collaborators to refine and scale their projects.
- Research that is deployed in multiple communities is more likely to advance science and lead to scalable and commercialized outputs.

- Facilitate and matchmake for joint-proposals among members.
- Manage technology platform for member-to-member communications to share projects and find collaborators.
- Organize Annual Summit that brings together 200 leading researchers and practitioners involved in the MetroLab community.
- Offer project support that enables dissemination, replication, and scale.
- Connect promising research projects to a commercial ecosystem to enable scaling.

CIVIC RESEARCH AND INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM

- The civic research and innovation ecosystem is nascent, with limited funders from the federal, philanthropic, and corporate sectors.
- There are opportunities to leverage new or existing programs to support work underway between MetroLab's university-local government members.
- There are opportunities to partner with civic leadership and practitioner communities to introduce research and innovation expertise.

- Partner with funders to develop new mechanisms to support civic research and innovation.
- Educate the funder community about the value of civic research and innovation.
- Provide entree to civic leadership and practitioner communities to strengthen university-local government partnerships and disseminate and scale projects.
- Serve as a collaborator and convener to assist member research and deployment activities.

Our Current Initiatives

Civic Innovation Challenge

MetroLab is partnering with the National Science Foundation and other federal agencies to launch a national "research and action" competition in the smart and connected communities domain, with a focus on pressing public sector priorities. The Civic Innovation Challenge demonstrates how MetroLab can leverage its expertise and positioning to bring new programs and funding to the table to support activity underway between universities and local governments. This initiative elevates the work underway between cities and universities in the MetroLab ecosystem by providing funding and support for leading work underway in the civic research domain. <READ MORE>

Innovation of the Month

MetroLab Network has partnered with Government Technology to bring its readers a segment called the MetroLab Innovation of the Month Series, which highlights impactful tech, data, and innovation projects underway between cities and universities. The Innovation of the Month confers visibility and credibility to projects that are transforming the built and natural environment, service delivery, and civic engagement in their communities. <READ MORE>

Thought Leadership

MetroLab leverages its network and creates opportunities for members to highlight their projects and perspectives in reports that address high-priority areas. Past reports have focused on predictive analytics in human services, technology for data integration, and an exploration of civic innovation activities across the U.S. These pieces create opportunities for members to showcase their expertise and partnerships and position them for broader dissemination and impact. <READ MORE>

Annual Summit

The MetroLab Summit brings together a leading community of academics and practitioners from across the civic ecosystem that is leveraging technology, analytics, and innovation to address a range of priorities, from urban planning, to data privacy, to sustainability, to social service delivery. The event is unique: unlike many corporate conferences, the MetroLab Summit is oriented around workshops and discussions that elevate projects underway across the country, explore issues at the frontier of civic research and innovation, and cultivate an international community of peers. <READ MORE>

Member Platform and Project Library

MetroLab Network facilitates information-sharing and member-to-member communications that enable the dissemination and replication of projects and partnership structures. MetroLab maintains a member site that offers a technology platform that facilitates member collaboration. MetroLab also maintains a project library that features more than 100 projects underway between universities and local governments in its network. <MEMBER PLATFORM> <PROJECT LIBRARY>

Landscape

Academics across disciplines are increasingly interested in applied research that impacts their community. Among the richest areas in this domain of "civic research and innovation" activity leverages data and technology to address the pressures and priorities of local government. There is a pressing societal need to foster cities and communities that are responsive to the diverse needs of their residents. The responsibility for these activities often falls upon local government — cities, towns, and counties — as they manage a suite of services and public assets that directly impact residents. Local governments have provided these services for decades, but rapid growth of technical scientific fields have created opportunities to leverage data, technology, and other new approaches to target, measure, and improve these services. These functions inherently cut across academic disciplines, and their improvement requires the creation, application, and scaling of new technologies and data approaches.

MetroLab introduces a number of aspects that advance civic research and innovation. First, the university-local government partnership is the foundation upon which cross-disciplinary academic teams can develop relationships and partnerships with policymakers in local government in order to test and deploy new approaches. Second, MetroLab's peer network allows for the spreading of best practices and deeper collaboration between universities and local governments across the world. Finally, MetroLab harnesses this community and integrates it into a broader civic ecosystem that includes government agencies, philanthropies, companies, and nonprofits focused on addressing the core priorities of cities and communities, including: inequality in income, health, mobility, security and opportunity; smart and resilient infrastructure; and environmental sustainability and resiliency.

MetroLab is the only organization with this unique orientation. Through its own activities and through partnerships with a global set of stakeholders, MetroLab continues to push forward a vision of data-driven, research-informed cities and communities better equipped to meet the needs of their residents.

Strategic Priorities

There are five strategic priorities for the next 36 months:

1. **Strengthening the Civic Research and Innovation Ecosystem**
2. **Advancing MetroLab Member Projects**
3. **Strengthening University-Local Government Partnerships**
4. **Cultivating a Peer Network and Member-Driven Organization**
5. **Engaging Students and Cultivating Talent**

Each strategic priority includes a set of activities and a timeframe for execution. That timeline is divided into three phases: short-term (2020 priority); medium term (2020-2021 priority); and long-term (2022+ priority).

1. Strengthening the Civic Research and Innovation Ecosystem

Work with institutional stakeholders from government, philanthropy, and industry to create more funding and programs that invest in and lift civic research and innovation activity.

1.1 Support the development of new federal funding opportunities that underpin civic research and innovation collaborations between universities and their communities.

- 1.1.1 Through technical assistance and advocacy, work with federal stakeholders to develop and deliver additional funding opportunities. [2020-21 priority]

1.2 Manage and facilitate major funding opportunities, like the Civic Innovation Challenge.

- 1.2.1 Provide dedicated staff time to communicating, implementing and managing funding opportunities that directly impact the membership. [2020 priority]

1.3 Help university and local governments pitch their civic research and innovation work with state governments, local philanthropies, and their communities.

- 1.3.1 Develop templates for presentations and talking points about how university-local government projects are achieving priorities in communities and warrant funding and partnership with key stakeholders locally. [2020-21 priority]

2. Advancing MetroLab Members' Projects

Identify, cultivate, and connect funding opportunities for university members and their home communities.

2.1 Support the development of new federal funding opportunities that underpin civic research and innovation activities between universities and their local government partners.

- 2.1.1 Connect MetroLab university members and their partner local governments to civic research and innovation focused federal stakeholders to help guide and inform university-local government research priorities and project opportunities. [2020-21 priority]
- 2.1.2 Arrange twice-yearly phone calls for federal relations representatives from member universities to update them on MetroLab activities as well as provide accompanying one-page fact-sheets that allow these individuals to showcase MetroLab's work with their stakeholders. [2020-21]
- 2.1.3 Showcase MetroLab and its member universities in Congressional hearings related to smart cities / civic research and innovation. [2022+]

2.2 Identify relevant federal funding opportunities and provide technical assistance to help members access them for civic research and innovation collaborations.

- 2.2.1 Disseminate key funding opportunities across the network [2020 priority]
- 2.2.2 Provide technical assistance and guidance to member universities and local governments on federal funding applications. [2020-21]
- 2.2.3 Convene teams and work with a lead institution, virtually or through workshops, to apply for federal funding opportunities outside of the Smart & Connected Community domain, like Engineering Research Centers. [2022+]

2.3 Foster relationships with the philanthropic community and support the development of philanthropic funding opportunities relevant to members.

- 2.3.1 Involve funders in MetroLab Network activities, including funder-specific programming during the Annual Summit. [2020 priority]
- 2.3.2 Convene interested members for a philanthropic working group to provide technical assistance in pursuit of funding opportunities. [2020-21]
- 2.3.3 Help assemble funders' collaborative dedicated to civic research, innovation, and technology priorities. [2022+]
- 2.3.4 Work with members to create an internal directory of key funders and past relevant grants, including key artifacts such as successful member grant applications. [2022+]

2.4 Pursue industry partnerships that advance civic research and innovation.

- 2.4.1 Continue to work with industry collaborations to sponsor the Annual Summit. [2020 priority]
- 2.4.2 Explore new opportunities for strategic partnerships that invest in MetroLab and member institutions in ways that align to industry R&D, business operations, and corporate social responsibility priorities. [2020-21]

3. Strengthening University-Local Government Partnerships

Help foster more and better university-local government collaborations focused on data- and technology-oriented civic research and innovation.

3.1 Identify and encourage best practices for collaboration between local government-university members

- 3.1.1 Empower members to work with local government and academic leaders to understand the value of collaboration and MetroLab broadly as a channel for advancing their community priorities. [2020 priority]
- 3.1.2 Develop and drive adoption of tools that help cities engage with universities to develop strong relationships and regular plans for collaboration. [2020-21]
- 3.1.3 Produce a "how to" guide on general ways local governments can engage with universities, like sponsored research, student internships, and partnership on courses and curriculum. [2020-21]

3.2 Engage key champions and allies within each university-local government partnership

- 3.2.1 Cultivate broad support from each partnership to better support the needs of members. [2020 priority]
- 3.2.2 Hold standing phone or virtual communications with members on project and organization updates. [2020-21]
- 3.2.3 Develop and source experts and topics for webinars on university-local government led projects. [2020-21]

3.3 Promote Civic Research Agendas as a tool for advancing university-local government partnership

- 3.3.1 Create replicable process for creating civic research agendas locally, based on current best practice models. [2020 priority]
- 3.3.2 Provide technical assistance to help craft civic research agendas. [2020-21]
- 3.3.3 Develop a national civic research agenda that advances civic research priorities and informs federal and philanthropic programming and funding. [2022+]

3.4 Tell member stories

- 3.4.1 Continue current communications programs, including *Innovation of the Month.* [2020 priority]
- 3.4.2 Highlight international members' projects and find ways for projects in different countries to reach audiences across borders [2020-21]
- 3.4.3 Identify additional opportunities to share members' work, both on completed and ongoing projects. Tailor communications to advance specific purposes, like recruiting funders, attracting new members, or helping academic and local government leaders see the value of the network. [2020-21]

4. Cultivating a Peer Network and Member-Driven Organization

Strengthening a member-driven network rooted in knowledge-sharing and collaboration.

4.1 Facilitate member-to-member engagement and collaboration

- 4.1.1 Organize MetroLab Summit to enable member-to-member engagement, project dissemination, relevant capacity building, and interaction between institutional partners from the federal government, philanthropy, and civic organizations with university and local government stakeholders. [2020]
- 4.1.2 Create and refine a member platform to enable member-to-member communication and collaboration. [2020 priority]
- 4.1.3 Create an online project library limited to members that contains projects at each state of project lifecycle - planning, seeking funding, design, execution, completion. [2020-21]
- 4.1.4 Capture and disseminate metrics to assess network and urban innovation activity. [2022+]
- 4.1.5 Develop a Community of Practice with shared objectives to encourage more robust networking and engagement opportunities as well as boost project advancement and dissemination. [2022+]

4.2 Develop regional and thematic connections to foster working relationships among members

- 4.2.1 Work with members to inform projects and interest areas, based on timely and relevant topics in the civic ecosystem. [2020 priority]
- 4.2.2 Identify university-local government pairs/groups that could work closer together due to shared research expertise or geographic presence. [2020-21]
- 4.2.3 Identify funding, research, and student opportunities based on common goals/projects for local governments-universities to pursue. [2020-21]
- 4.2.4 Curate a series of strategic localized events and/or discussions for enhanced learning. [2022+]

5. Engaging Students and Cultivating Talent

Strengthen the community of practitioners and train the next generation of leaders working at the intersection of university-local government data and technology collaborations.

5.1 Promote equity and participation of communities that have been disproportionately affected by urban change
- 5.1.1 Develop best practices on how to engage these communities meaningfully during civic research. [2022+ priority]
- 5.1.2 Establish principles that encourage researchers and practitioners to engage in ethical research that drives positive outcomes. [2022+]

5.2 Expose students, graduates, and young academics to the civic research and innovation field
- 5.2.2 Develop a framework for how researchers or practitioners can develop careers at the intersection of academia and local government. [2020-21 priority]
- 5.2.1 Promote and/or partner to develop internships and fellowships that allow students to spend time in local governments to bring cutting-edge skills from academia to government. [2022+]

5.3 Enable academic careers in civic research and innovation
- 5.3.1 Leverage other activities in the strategic plan in order to provide valuable experiences to early-career faculty to further their academic careers. [2022+ priority]
- 5.3.2 Facilitate funding opportunities for graduate students and early-career faculty, especially those that offer diverse voices or further equity and representation in the civic research and innovation field. [2022+]

Metrics

MetroLab will use the strategic plan to guide activity over the coming three years. MetroLab will engage members and other stakeholders frequently to understand which programs and activities are considered effective and emphasize and modify priorities accordingly. MetroLab has identified the following metrics to track success, organized by the five strategic priorities:

Strengthening the Civic Research and Innovation Ecosystem

- Funding generated through MetroLab partnerships available to the civic research and innovation ecosystem
- Number of formalized partnerships, through collaborative projects, between MetroLab and organizations in the civic ecosystem

Advancing MetroLab Member Projects

- Number of members that engage MetroLab as a collaborator on grants, projects, and events
- Levels of funding that flow to member projects through initiatives developed by MetroLab
- Number of new projects undertaken by MetroLab members
- Number of projects that involve collaborators from at least two MetroLab member sites and/or scale from one MetroLab member site to others

Strengthening University-Local Government Partnerships

- Number of locally-held events in the MetroLab-domain at member institutions
- Number of members with regularly scheduled meetings with local government-university counterparts
- Growth of MetroLab audience, including university-local government partnership key stakeholders; newsletter and social media audiences; and conference attendees

Cultivating a Peer Network and Member-Driven Organization

- Percentage of members that renew membership each year
- Number of new members, including number of local government and university members that are added to existing partnerships

Engaging Students and Cultivating Talent

- Number of students who participate in MetroLab events and programs

Future Opportunities for Growth

MetroLab will consider opportunities to shape the civic research and innovation domain in a number of ways that extend beyond the term of this strategic plan (2020-2022). The following priorities have been identified, which will continue to be scoped and refined with time:

1. Define and grow civic research as an academic field, composed of academics across disciplines and partners from practitioner communities
2. Define promising career paths for people who seek to bridge academic and practitioner communities
3. Create a high-profile platform for civic research projects to be published and/or featured
4. Develop partnerships with accelerators, incubators, investors, and funders to assist in the commercialization of private ventures and institutionalization of social ventures that emerge from MetroLab member partnerships
5. Educate institutional stakeholders, including the federal government, philanthropy, and civic leadership organizations of the impact and promise of civic research

Next Steps

As MetroLab Network members, supporters, and friends, we would encourage you to review this strategic plan and reach out to us if you have any questions or comments. MetroLab's staff began the work to deliver on these strategic priorities starting January 2020 and the board and staff will provide updates to the network periodically. <CONTACT US>

Acknowledgements

The MetroLab Board of Directors and Staff acknowledge the many supporters and friends who have helped MetroLab thrive, including the following funders, partners, and members:

International Members:
- Bristol – University of Bristol
- Edmonton – University of Alberta
- Glasgow – University of Glasgow
- Liverpool – University of Liverpool

US Members:
- Arlington County – Virginia Tech
- Atlanta – Georgia Institute of Technology
- Austin – University of Texas, Austin
- Boston – Boston University, Northeastern University
- Boulder, Denver – University of Colorado Boulder
- Chattanooga – University of Tennessee-Chattanooga
- Chicago – University of Chicago
- Cuyahoga County – Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland State University
- Fairfax County – George Mason University
- Gainesville – University of Florida
- Guilford County – University of North Carolina at Greensboro
- Hennepin County, Minneapolis, St. Paul – University of Minnesota
- Houston – Rice University
- Greater Kansas City – University of Kansas, University of Missouri, Kansas City
- Memphis – University of Memphis
- Greater Miami and the Beaches – University of Miami, Florida International University, Miami Dade College
- New York – New York University
- Newark – New Jersey Institute of Technology
- Pittsburgh – Carnegie Mellon University, University of Pittsburgh
- Portland – Portland State University
- San Antonio – University of Texas, San Antonio
- San Diego – University of California, San Diego
- Seattle – University of Washington
- South Bend – University of Notre Dame
- Tampa – University of South Florida