

Innovation at The Point

The Point of The Mountain State Land Authority entrusted the Utah System of Higher Education, through the Associate Commissioner of Innovation, with the responsibility to spearhead the organization of innovation efforts. The overarching objective is to establish a collaborative ecosystem that connects higher education, government, and industry, with a specific focus on commercialization and economic development for the state. The process commenced with the selection and appointment of the Associate Commissioner of Innovation to lead the creation of an innovation district, encompassing not only The Point Project but also a statewide endeavor to foster connectivity across education systems.

The initial phase of the project entailed developing a comprehensive vision, following a three-pronged approach:

1. Firstly, a thorough assessment was conducted to evaluate the existing strengths, assets, and needs of the institutions within the System.
2. Secondly, external visits were made to innovation hubs worldwide, to understand potential challenges and identify proven models for success.
3. Lastly, a visioning committee comprising leaders from industry, higher education, and government was formed, tasked with formulating a detailed plan and delineating the scope of the Innovation District.

During the initial phase of the plan, three critical insights emerged as indispensable:

1. The recognition of the need for a dedicated convening space to facilitate effective collaboration and interaction among stakeholders. Specifically, a location that may serve as a physical home for the ecosystem being developed across the state.
2. The establishment of a translational commercialization fund designed to provide essential gap funding for university research endeavors.
3. The development of strategic planning frameworks targeting the community, higher education, and policy ecosystem.

Consequently, the initiatives of Convergence Hall, Utah Policy Innovation Lab, and Utah Innovation Lab were created to address these priorities. These entities provide vital infrastructure and resources to support the Innovation District and its objectives.

Convergence Hall:

Convergence Hall is a critical component of the Innovation District, poised to fulfill essential roles in fostering collaboration, efficiency, and value within Utah's higher education institutions and the innovative ecosystem. It will provide purpose-built office spaces that facilitate interdisciplinary cooperation and the dismantling of silos, ultimately leading to enhanced outcomes. Each university will be represented by dedicated offices situated at The Point, enabling seamless collaboration with their respective institutions and other colleges, as well as leveraging synergies on a statewide scale. As well as co-working and incubator spaces that allow for the “bumpability” of ideas and conversations between researchers, educators, and innovators.

Moreover, Convergence Hall will serve as an educational hub, offering immersive and interactive facilities designed to cater to K-12 and higher education students through our STEM makerspace that teaches facets of design and systems thinking, as well as an interactive and technology inspired museum highlighting Utah innovative past and curators of innovation. This unique approach will enable experiential learning opportunities and establish a robust pipeline to cultivate Utah's future workforce. By providing a state-of-the-art ecosystem, it will drive technological innovation, nurture a thriving startup culture, and foster meaningful connections among universities, businesses, and entrepreneurs.

With spaces for networking, dining, and being creative through music and art, it will further the connection of an interdisciplinary ecosystem. The space will include an auditorium that will be able to house state summits, pitch events, business conventions, hackathons, competitions, and statewide events, for example, aimed at bringing together a variety of organizations, businesses, and educational systems to share in experiences of learning and economic development. It is worth highlighting that universities and colleges across Utah have rallied behind the endeavor, supporting the establishment of a vibrant and dynamic community for entrepreneurs, startups, and established companies operating within the technology and innovation sectors. This collective effort underscores the commitment to creating an environment conducive to growth, collaboration, and economic prosperity in Utah's innovation ecosystem.

Utah Policy Innovation Lab:

The Utah Policy Innovation Lab is a public-private partnership that brings together academics, policy experts, and business leaders to collaborate and share best practices that benefit Utahns. The Policy Lab serves as a convener of people. Through its trusted relationships with Utah's higher education institutions across the state, the Policy Lab breaks down silos and facilitates information sharing with Utah's best and brightest.

The Utah Policy Innovation Lab facilitates the exchange of ideas and insights, promotes innovation, and leverages the collective expertise and resources of each stakeholder group to address complex policy challenges facing Utah. It drives evidence-based policy solutions informed by diverse perspectives and grounded in rigorous research and analysis. The Policy Lab has partnered with the Kem C. Gardner Institute, ensuring a data-driven approach to its work that will help to inform statewide policy and decision-making.

Current Working Groups and Projects:

- Energy Advisory Council
- Energy Statewide Strategic Planning Committee
- AI Policy Working Group
- The Blockchain & Digital Innovation Taskforce
- Data Privacy Working Group
- Unified Economic Opportunity Commission – Technology, Innovation & Investment
- Regulatory Sandbox

Utah Innovation Lab:

The Utah Innovation Lab Act establishes the Utah Innovation Lab, an organization with a specialized focus on commercializing research that emerges from Utah's institutions of higher education through technology commercialization. By creating this lab, the Act aims to facilitate the transformation of innovative ideas and technologies developed in these educational institutions into successful commercial ventures. The lab will be governed by a dedicated board overseeing its operations and managing the Utah Innovation Fund, which will provide financial support to qualifying businesses. This initiative seeks to promote the advancement of cutting-edge technologies developed within Utah's higher education institutions, boost the state's economy, and generate new job opportunities. Additionally, the Act emphasizes the importance of transparency and accountability by requiring the lab to adhere to specific audit and reporting requirements. Overall, the Utah Innovation Lab Act strives to promote innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic growth by fostering collaboration between academia and industry and by providing the necessary resources and support to commercialize breakthrough technologies emerging from Utah's higher education institutions.