

# The Boston Globe

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## Business

### Leaders seek to boost biotech sector

**Study: Find ways to fund start-ups, widen WiFi access**

By Chris Reidy  
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To ensure Boston remains a hotbed of innovation, a new study recommends that local leaders devise ways to help fund early-stage biotech and information-technology research, mount a campaign that brands Greater Boston as a birthplace of new ideas, and make low-cost wireless Internet access widely available.

The study, from the Boston History & Innovation Collaborative, an alliance of business, community, and university leaders, will be unveiled today at a Boston College Citizen Seminar.

Some study proposals have been recommended by others. Mayor Thomas M. Menino, for instance, recently said he was forming a WiFi task force to explore building a citywide wireless fidelity network.

While other economic-outlook studies have focused on high housing costs and population growth, the collaborative took a four-century overview in an attempt to isolate factors that have enabled Boston's economy to repeatedly reinvent itself, said Bob Krim, executive director.

Five driving forces explain the region's resilience, the study said. One surprise is that Boston's research universities and teaching hospitals were not among them.

The driving forces behind Boston's history of innovation, the study concluded, are:

- A key entrepreneur or a team of leaders.

- A diverse mix of people, businesses, and educational institutions that foster collaboration and networking.

- Local funding.

- Local demand used by entrepreneurs to define or perfect an idea or a product.

- National or global demand.

"If Boston is to maintain its economic prosperity into our fifth century, we must design strategies to sustain these long-term drivers," said Stephen P. Crosby, the collaborative's chairman.

Those forces are a "secret sauce" that have created an innovative culture, and their interplay yields a major dividend: a "bump rate," which the study defined as the phenomenon of planned and unplanned meetings among entrepreneurs, funders, researchers, and other professionals" due to their proximity.

The study does an "intriguing" job of "knitting together some of the recent scholarship on what makes a place innovative," said Stephan Weiler, an economist

with the Federal Reserve Bank in Kansas City.

One study recommendation is to develop an initiative that would create a syndication among venture capitalists, pharmaceutical and biotech companies, and academic leaders that would "share-fund" early-stage research.

"It's an interesting proposition," said Joseph Cortright, an Oregon economist who studies the biotechnology industry. "But it strikes me as a big challenge."

Still, life sciences represent the region's biggest opportunity for innovation, said Peter Slavin, president of Massachusetts General Hospital and a panel member at the BC seminar who will comment on the report.

"Shame on us if we don't lead the way in life sciences," Slavin said.

Another recommendation is to brand Greater Boston as a birthplace of new ideas; the study suggests a series of pieces of innovation-themed public art at locations such as the Longwood Medical & Academic Area or Cambridge's Kendall Square. These displays would also note that local innovations weren't the exclusive domain of white males. Displays might cel-

brate William Hinton, a black doctor who devised tests for syphilis, or Ellen Swallow Richards, an MIT-trained chemist and a pioneer of sanitary engineering.

Not only would deploying WiFi capabilities benefit the region, but such a network would "send a message to entrepreneurs and to firms seeking to relocate that we are continuing to be a leader in innovation," the study said.

Titled "Innovate Boston! Shaping the Future from our Past: Four Amazing Centuries of Innovation," the study was funded by the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative, Biogen Idec Inc., and 14 other institutions.

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#### Eye on Boston's future

A study recommends local leaders devise ways — including funding start-ups and expanding the availability of wireless Net access — to ensure that Boston stays a hotbed of innovation. **D3**

**A leadership alliance wants to help Boston endure as a hotbed of innovation.**