



Randy Asselin
Tech entrepreneur in Albuquerque

Business Development and Technology Commercialization



YEAR ONE ASSUMPTION

Moving an invention from the lab to the marketplace is slow and daunting because the process to commercially exploit research varies widely.



YEAR ONE THEORY OF CHANGE

If we facilitate/support technology commercialization (for example, licensing agreements setting up joint ventures and partnerships, spin-out, etc.), then there will be more start-up companies.

This means: bringing resources out from “behind the fence” and putting the community in more contact with lab and business development resources.



Lisa Abeyta - App City Life
Leadership Partner of City Alive



SIX YEAR OUTCOMES

Tech Navigator

Improved Infrastructure and Stronger Relationships

In order to facilitate collaborative work, Albuquerque needed better infrastructure and stronger relationships to affect future outcomes. To do this, we piloted the Technology Navigator program to improve infrastructure and connectivity across sectors.

	Aligned contributions	
Albuquerque Community Foundation	University of New Mexico	Sandia National Labs and Air Force Research Lab
<p>\$600,000 granted to nonprofit organizations that support entrepreneurs and high-growth companies through Mayor's Prize for Entrepreneurship.</p>	<p>UNM has ranked in top 100 universities worldwide in the volume of patents issued, and ranked 2nd in the nation for innovation impact for mid-sized universities.</p>	<p>Established offices out from "behind the fence" in places accessible to students, entrepreneurs, and the public.</p>

Digging Deeper

In 2014, neither Sandia National Labs or the Air Force Research Lab had established offices out in the community. Today both Sandia and AFRL have thriving satellite technology transfer offices at the Innovate ABQ campus, co-located with UNM and CNM. This move brings students, entrepreneurs, and the public into more contact with the resources and minds from “behind the fence.”

City Alive helped galvanize the cross-sector partnerships that were forming in early 2013 between the research laboratories like Sandia National Labs and the University of New Mexico with local entrepreneurs and start-ups. In collaboration with Sandia National Labs and Los Alamos National Labs, UNM has already spun off twelve start-up companies from jointly owned technologies and generated over ten million dollars in revenue.

Additionally, Sandia National Labs was included among 14 of the world’s leading companies with programs and initiatives that are taking diversity and inclusion to a new level, [according to Diversity Journal](#). Sandia Labs earned the award for “Inclusive Leadership and Transformative Change” and is the only national laboratory recognized with the latest awards.

The public-private partnerships at Innovate ABQ expanded possibilities in Albuquerque’s downtown innovation district. The idea was to create a physical space where collaboration and cross-pollination of ideas would be easier and more synergistic.

RACIAL EQUITY FOCUS

The Navajo Nation leased the top two floors of the UNM Rainforest building through an MOU with Innovate ABQ. The space offers dormitories for Navajo students, creating a culturally sustaining environment in the center of Albuquerque’s Innovation District.



“The latest tech is sitting on [Sandia Lab’s] shelves, and they need help bringing it to market [...] New Mexico has all the tools and resources right here in our backyard to transform our state, and set a new national leadership standard.”

– Frederick Esters, Entrepreneur

Estech Global - [Read more about Frederick here](#)





The seven-acre campus is still growing, and now houses offices for UNM Innovation Academy, Sandia National Labs, and the Air Force Research Lab (AFRL), along with CNM's FUSE Makerspace, and ABQid, a community funded accelerator program.

POLICY CHANGE FOCUS

The Technology Gross Receipts Tax Credit began a three-year pilot program in March 2020. Companies that obtain a cooperative research and development agreement with Sandia and Los Alamos Labs will be able to apply for \$150,000 in technical assistance per year for procurement, prototyping, and testing. In turn, both laboratories will be able to claim tax credits against their gross receipts tax liabilities for their work with businesses. In total, the labs will be able to provide up to \$4.5 million in time, technical assistance and resources over three years.

Key Takeaways and Learnings

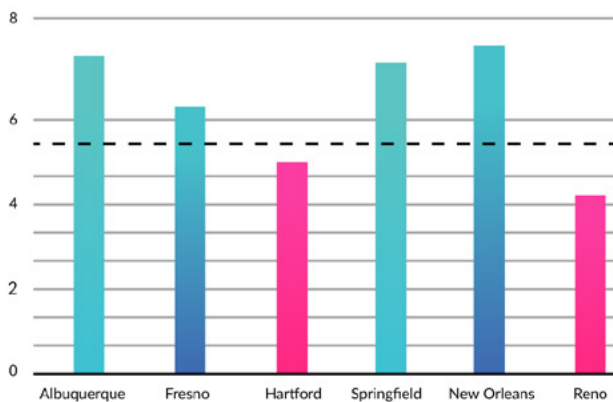
Collaborative spaces are key to creating environments that lay the groundwork for high-growth companies. Although New Mexico is home to three of the most prominent research labs in the nation (Los Alamos National Labs, Sandia National Laboratories, and the Air Force Research Lab), the technologies, discoveries, and resources have, until recently, been for the most part inaccessible to the public.

Albuquerque needed to cultivate more so-called “collisions” – where entrepreneurs, researchers, developers, and scientists organically “run into” each other, share conversations and insights, and build trust.

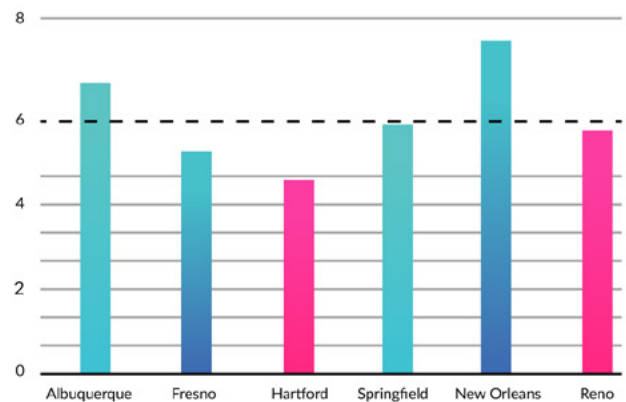
Albuquerque was a great testing ground for the hypothesis that if there were more opportunities for technology commercialization (e.g., licensing agreements, joint ventures, spin-out, etc.), it would lead to more start-up companies. UNM has ranked in the top 100 universities worldwide for the volume of patents issued, and ranked 2nd in the nation for innovation impact for mid-sized universities.

Collisions build founder relationships and a strong sense of community in start-up ecosystems

Collisions with Local Start-up Community



Frequency of Local Start-up Events



We learned that **existing organizational relationships are key**. We couldn't just drop these tech transfer offices into an office space, and expect start-up businesses to find them on their own. Innovation districts need time to build: 1) trust between the partners, 2) awareness of the space in the entrepreneurial community, and 3) shared goals that promote collective progress.



We also learned that tech transfer, as an emerging field, lacks the education infrastructure needed to transition it from a buzzword into a career path. The UNM Innovation Academy has played a crucial role in making the logical next step: creating a new college track, degree program, or certification.

Racial equity and access continues to be a challenge in the technology sector. There is much work to do to bring in more entrepreneurs and students of color into this burgeoning career path (see Entrepreneurship and Inclusion case study for more).

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