**InnovateGSO**
**A Statement of Need for Accelerating Inclusive Innovation**

*To create a culture of inclusive innovation in Greensboro, we must widen the net of prosperity by connecting diverse makers and designers from under-connected groups to an expanded innovation ecosystem that unleashes design innovation for increased economic development opportunities.*

InnovateGSO's mission is to infuse opportunity and prosperity throughout Greensboro by purposefully engaging under-connected populations to unleash design innovation for economic growth. Under-connected and economically disadvantaged populations - college students, people of color, immigrants, millennials, encorepreneurs (boomers looking for a next gig), retirees, scientists, artists, academic professionals, and international visa holders - lack key relationships and connectivity to the people, information and resources available to successfully launch and sustain desired entrepreneurial efforts. Our vision is to create a design destination that attracts, develops and retains diverse creative talent and enterprises to establish Greensboro as an epicenter for inclusive innovation.

### InnovateGSO History
InnovateGSO is Greensboro's plan for accelerating inclusive innovation, developed by our Council of 28 diverse community members representing all sectors of Greensboro. The largest city in InnovateNC's Cross-City Collaborative, our InnovateGSO Council formed in September 2015 to begin a two-year initiative including strategic planning, research and data analysis, storytelling and policy recommendations. Throughout the process, the Greensboro Chamber of Commerce has served as our backbone organization and the City of Greensboro has provided financial support.

Greensboro has a long history as a creative and connected city – an **education hub** with seven institutions of higher education and college students making up over 10% of our population; a **maker city** that designs and manufactures products that people use worldwide; and a **globally connected city** with exporting as part of our DNA. InnovateGSO aspires to build on these historical strengths by linking our dispersed innovation and entrepreneurial assets and connect new diverse designers and makers to monetize ideas and scale their impact.

### InnovateGSO Future
New sectors are emerging that build on design thinking theory in product design – translating to process, program and service design – all with a customer-centric approach. Greensboro has a legacy as a leader in *Manufacturing, Transportation, Arts & Culture and Education*. The critical discoveries of InnovateGSO are how design, in conjunction with emerging technologies such as the Internet of Things (IoT), can be a catalyst for new frontiers of discovery in these legacy sectors. How can our purposeful collisions of artists and scientists, form and function, innovate around solving our society's complex problems, leading to new enterprise development and job growth? And how can we make sure these emerging economic opportunities are available to more people – particularly communities that are currently disconnected?

It starts by connecting our existing pockets of innovation assets – 7 colleges and universities, Gateway University Research Park, Union Square Campus, Nussbaum Center, Co//ab, HQ Greensboro, the Forge, Revolution Mill, Center for Creative Leadership – to leverage their united potential as an innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem. We then strive to connect under-connected populations in our community through a *high-tech* on-line Navigator tool with *high-touch* wrap-around services through a Personal Navigator Network of actors.

### InnovateGSO Impact
The Personal Navigator tool will support innovators and entrepreneurs by connecting under-connected populations to the right resources at the right time. The tool will provide a roadmap of our regional entrepreneurial and innovation ecosystem in an easy to use on-line platform allowing entrepreneurs to find what they need to help start and grow their businesses. All entrepreneurial support organizations will have a presence on this site where local makers and creative entrepreneurs will "enter" via a short questionnaire. This

survey will allow the tool to "direct" the information received so that they can find the best place to go based on the stage of their idea or firm and what immediate support they need. Additionally, the site will have the following capabilities:

- Provide tracking capabilities for the entrepreneur to know where they've been and what they've "done"
- Encourage next steps for the entrepreneur – "pushing" them through programming and launch stages
- Capture attendance and participation metrics for entrepreneurial ecosystem members
- Develop and track key success metrics for use by partners and community
- Access mentors through the personal Navigator Network database

The on-line tool will provide the foundation and structure for the high-touch wrap-around services, including the Personal Navigator Network of ambassadors to assist under-connected populations to access the innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem. The combination of high-tech and high-touch approach will transform institutional structures, locations, and climates that can hinder our best efforts to serve diverse colleagues, providing equitable access to opportunity and overcome lack of connectivity and trust barriers that impede our economic growth. Partners and ambassadors in our network leadership model will include entrepreneur support organizations, businesses, civic and government agencies, academic institutions, nonprofits, industrial and commercial design team, foundations, healthcare, media and diverse community change agents trained through programs such as Other Voices, Impact Greensboro and Leadership Greensboro.

In addition to the Personal Navigator, a multi-purpose space for building innovation and design capacity is being planned for Union Square Campus Phase 2. This downtown hub will connect and catalyze the energies of our educational institutions, industry, and community to unleash the untapped design potential in Greensboro. Imagine bringing together a truly diverse community of engineers, artists, graphic designers, marketers, strategists, computer scientists, and entrepreneurs together to help them apply design thinking to local and global problem solving.  The possibilities for new forms of collaboration, applied innovation, and local and global impact is exciting – and can further differentiate Greensboro as a globally connected maker city.

Our key long-term outcomes include:

- Attract and Retain Talent ➔ *college students and early career creative designers and makers*
- Grow Jobs and Wages ➔ *creative design occupations with global market potential*
- Improve Equity *of Access* ➔ *meet needs of under-connected populations where they are*
- Build Network ➔ *strengthen connection between institutions and assets, people and potential*
- Invest and Support ➔ *deploy capital to emerging designers and makers creating beautiful technology*
- Create Identity ➔ *place-making design and innovation center building a distinctive buzz*

**InnovateGSO Operational Plan**

With our strategic plan in place, our engaged InnovateGSO Council is now poised for implementation of our high-tech Personal Navigator tool and high-touch Personal Navigator Network. Over the past 18 months, we have made tremendous progress in shifting mindsets and clarifying our vision and strategy, but meeting our objectives and outcomes for inclusive innovation will require investment in the following areas:

- **On-line Personal Navigator Tool:** deploy tool to reach new innovators; integrate efforts of all innovation and entrepreneurship support organizations; replicate tool and scale for roll-out to other communities

- **Personal Navigator Network:** recruit, on-board and train ambassadors for outreach to under-connected populations, monitor and evaluate network connections and progress

- **Marketing and Communications Outreach to Under-Connected:** develop success stories, website, social media and public relations strategy for partner and community engagement, as well as bridging to under-connected target populations of creative designers and makers

- **Network Leadership Capacity-Building and Sustainability:** partner with Center for Creative Leadership to train in network leadership, develop governance to maintain cross-boundary and multi-stakeholder buy-in; develop effective collaborative community economic development mechanisms to promote meaningful equity of access in Greensboro and include community in change management strategy

- **Community Indicators Project:** develop evaluation strategy with key outcome measures, determine data collection process, create communications platform with dashboard

- **Union Square Design and Innovation Center:** feasibility, planning and design for a physical gathering space for innovation and design assets at Union Square Phase 2 to build community capacity

**Sustainability through Network Leadership**

The Greensboro Chamber of Commerce will provide network leadership through housing and managing the Personal Navigator and help map, convene and connect Greensboro's entrepreneurial ecosystem. Network partners in this effort include all 7 higher education institutions, corporate innovation and design teams, entrepreneurs, investors, economic developers, civic resources, grass-roots organizations, multicultural community, artists and scientists, among others. Our success and sustainability will be dependent upon acting as a network of peer organizations committed to taking a highly collaborative approach with effective network leadership, based on four core principles:

- *Mission, Not Organization*: Leaders adopt strategies and tactics to achieve a mission, not necessarily to stimulate organizational growth.
- *Node, Not Hub*: Network partners see their organizations as a part of a larger web of activity directed toward a cause, not as a hub of action.
- *Humility, Not Brand*: Organizations work alongside their peers as equals and willingly take a backseat when their partners are in a better position to lead.
- *Trust, Not Control*: Trust and shared values are far more important than formal control mechanisms (contracts or accountability systems).

**Required Investment**

Through funding from NC IDEA, development on the Navigator tool is underway. Lincoln Financial Foundation has also provided initial funding for development and collection of key indicators and evaluation of the Navigator tool. Based on this initial investment and our proposed strategic and operational plan, InnovateGSO is seeking $350,000 over the next 18 months to implement our plan.

**Conclusion**

In Richard Florida's article "The Winners and Losers of Economic Clustering", based on a Martin Prosperity Institute study "Creativity, Clusters and the Competitive Advantage of Cities" in June 2015, they recommend fostering a combination of traded clusters (industries that export goods and services outside of their immediate geographic areas) and creative, knowledge-based occupations (science, technology, design). The intersection of creative occupations with traded markets is where the highest job growth and wage growth will be over the next decades. Greensboro has the assets to capitalize on this **creative-in-traded trend** if we act intentionally to do so and build our brand as a globally connected maker city.

While many cities have developed successful innovation districts, none have integrated and enhanced the efforts of multiple higher-education institutions, businesses and support partners to accelerate inclusive innovation as we propose. With support, InnovateGSO has the potential to lead the way with a unique model that will drive economic development and job creation for decades to come and firmly establish Greensboro as a model for inclusive innovation in North Carolina, across the United States and the world.

**Contacts**

Deborah Hooper, Co-Chair: Greensboro Chamber of Commerce, dhooper@greensboro.org, 336.387.8301
Cindy Thompson, Strategic Planning Chair: Boundless Impact, cthompson@boundlessimpact.org, 336.209.1570