

Keynote:

Ecosystems As Infrastructure

Building the Foundation for Global Innovation

Tim Rowe
BOTS
May 16, 2026

In 1999, a few friends from MIT got together and built a place they could put their startups.

We called it Cambridge Innovation Center (CIC)



CIC's Origin:

The startup space next to MIT

MIT

CIC

Heat Map of New Enterprises Adjacent to MIT

In the years that followed, CIC went on to build large, high-end shared **office** and **laboratory** facilities all around the world

- 10 cities
- ~ 130k m2

Today CIC Runs The Largest Shared Innovation Space in 5 Countries



US

CIC Cambridge
(1999)



Japan

CIC Tokyo
(2020)



Germany

CIC Berlin
(2024)



The Netherlands

CIC Rotterdam
(2017)



Poland

CIC Warsaw
(2020)

... With a growing global network



CAMPUS LOCATIONS

- CIC INNOVATION CAMPUS
- CIC LABS
- CIC INNOVATION CAMPUS - UPCOMING
- CIC LABS - UPCOMING

PROGRAMS

- VENTURE CAFÉ
- VENTURE CAFÉ - UPCOMING
- CIC INSTITUTE
- CAPTAINS OF INNOVATION
- CAPTAINS OF INNOVATION - UPCOMING

It has worked out pretty well...

~11,000 companies housed at CIC to-date

~\$34B of publicly disclosed VC investments into startups that grew up at CIC and our affiliated labs

Some big successes that grew from their early days at CIC (Android)

Several announced centers in development...



BATWorks

With NYC EDC
and LACI

New York, NY
2028

Climate



K-Bio CIC

With CHABio

Pangyo, Korea, 2026

Life Sciences
(Cell and Gene
Therapy)



O-NEXUS

With Nissay

Osaka, Japan, 2026

Life Sciences
(Regenerative
Medicine)

New York City Announcement

Mayor Adams, NYCEDC Announce Consortium to Design and Operate Cutting-Edge Climate Innovation Hub at Brooklyn Army Terminal

By NYCEDC | MAY 22 2025

press@edc.nyc



CIC will design and operate for New York City

Aims to be the largest cleantech hub in the world.

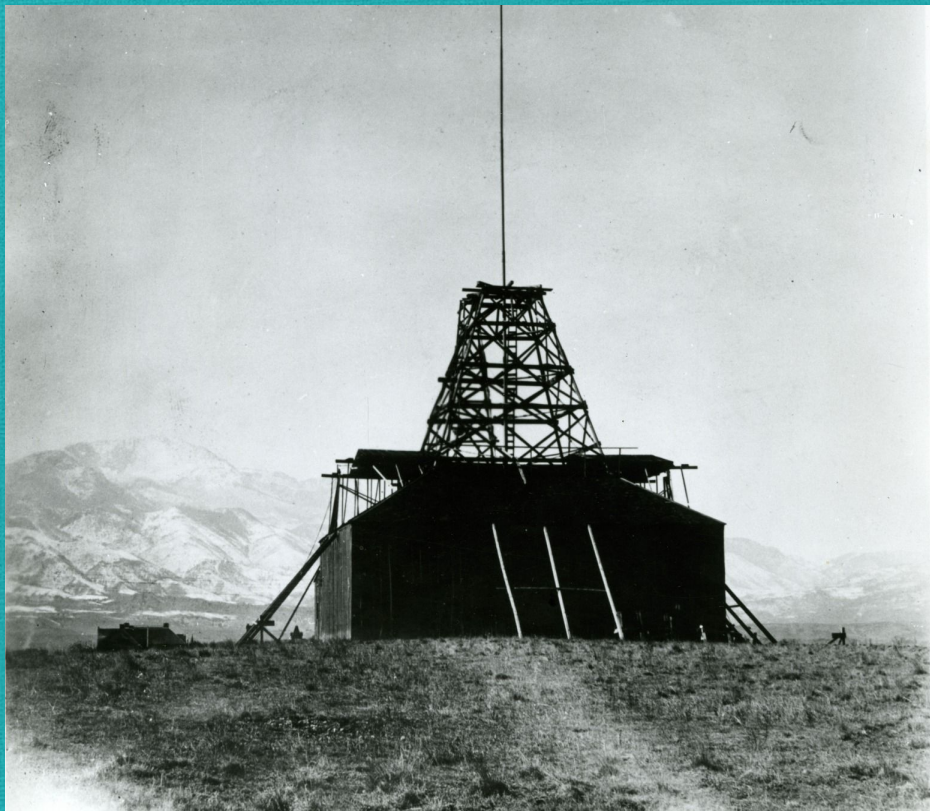
Funded with \$100M city investment

Located at the Brooklyn Army Terminal (BAT) on East River

~14K m2 (plus roof, dock area)

CIC partner Los Angeles Cleantech Incubator (LACI) will run workforce development and cleantech programming

A Brief History of Where People Innovate



Nikola Tesla's lab in Colorado Springs

Historically,
many people
innovated
in **isolation**

With a focus on
secrecy

Later, many came to cities, but there was no place for startups – so they worked out of places like **garages**.

Hewlett & Packard's garage



Steve Job's Garage



Today there are places specifically for startups, sometimes called “hubs”.

These are “**hot spots**” with strong access to talent, capital, customers.



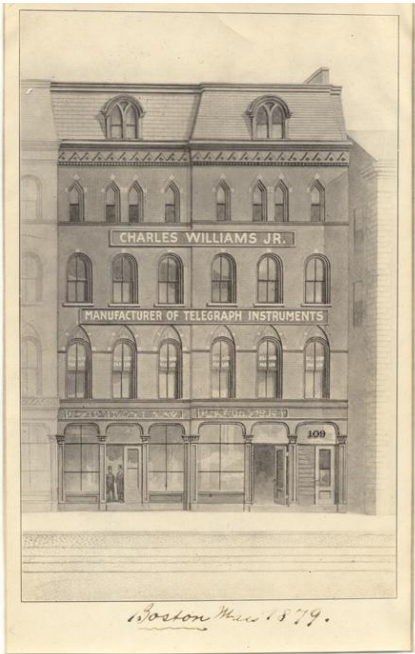
**The very best hubs evolve to become
“innovation meccas”**

**This occurs in rapidly emerging fields,
where know-how is scarce.**

An early “innovation mecca” formed in Boston in the 1870s



Alexander Graham Bell



109 COURT STREET
BOSTON

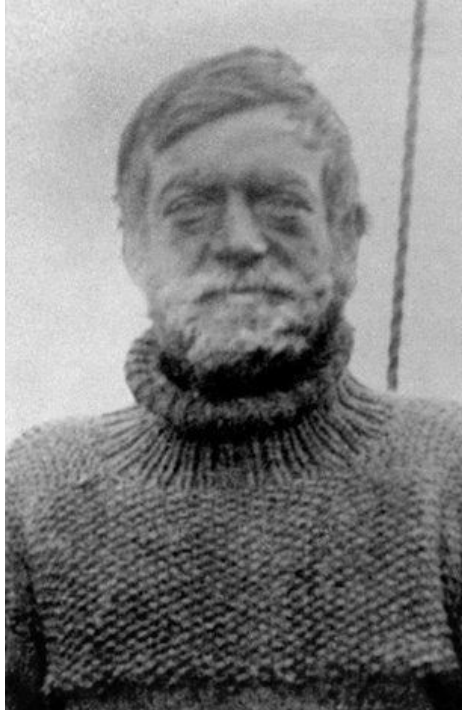


Thomas Edison

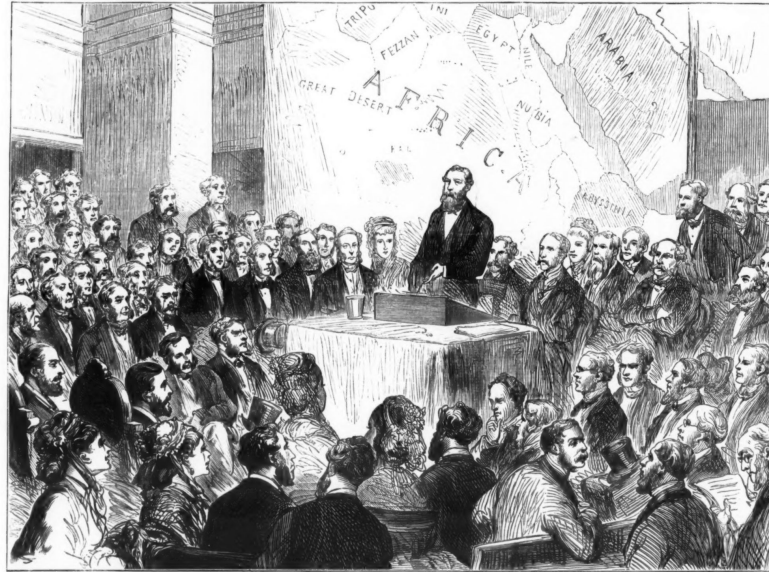


Lewis Latimer

There were prominent examples in the UK (London, 1830s-1950s)

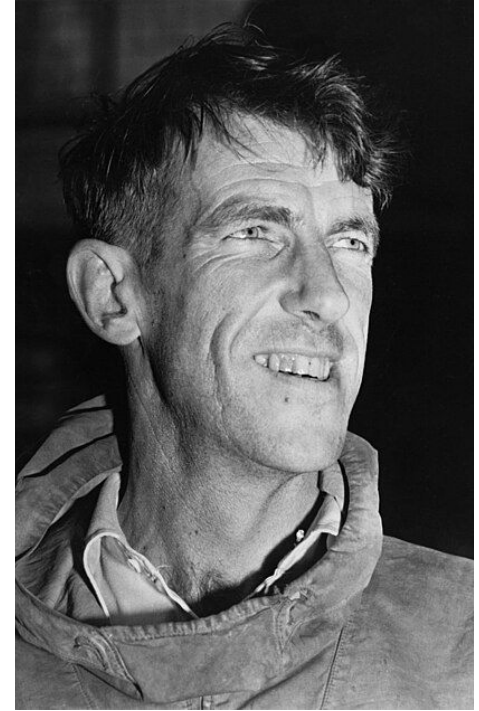


Ernest Shackleton



SIR SAMUEL BAKER AT THE MEETING OF THE ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY.

ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY
LONDON



Edmund Hillary

And in Japan (1950s Japan)



Tezuka Osamu



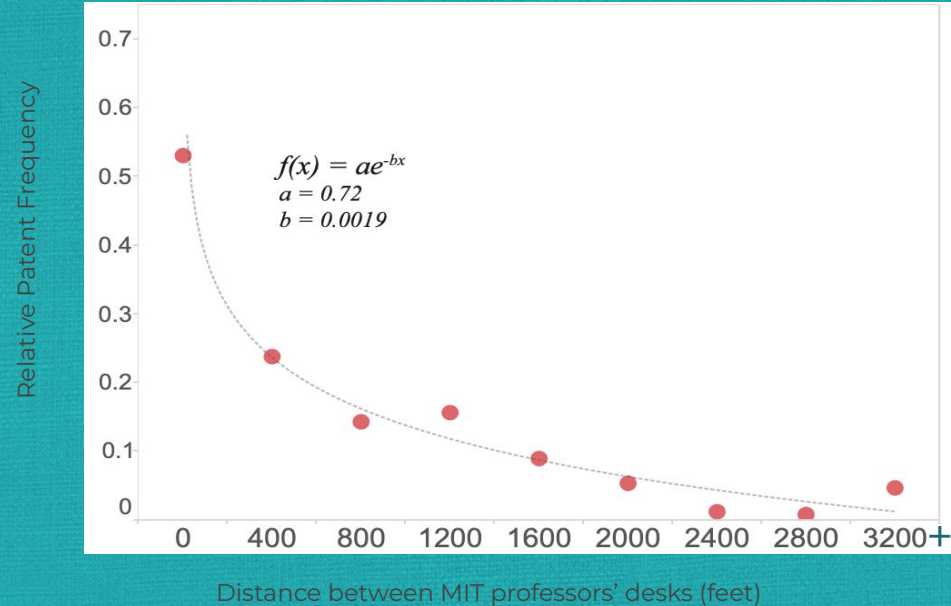
TOKIWA SO
TOKYO



Hiroshi Fujimoto and Motoo Abiko

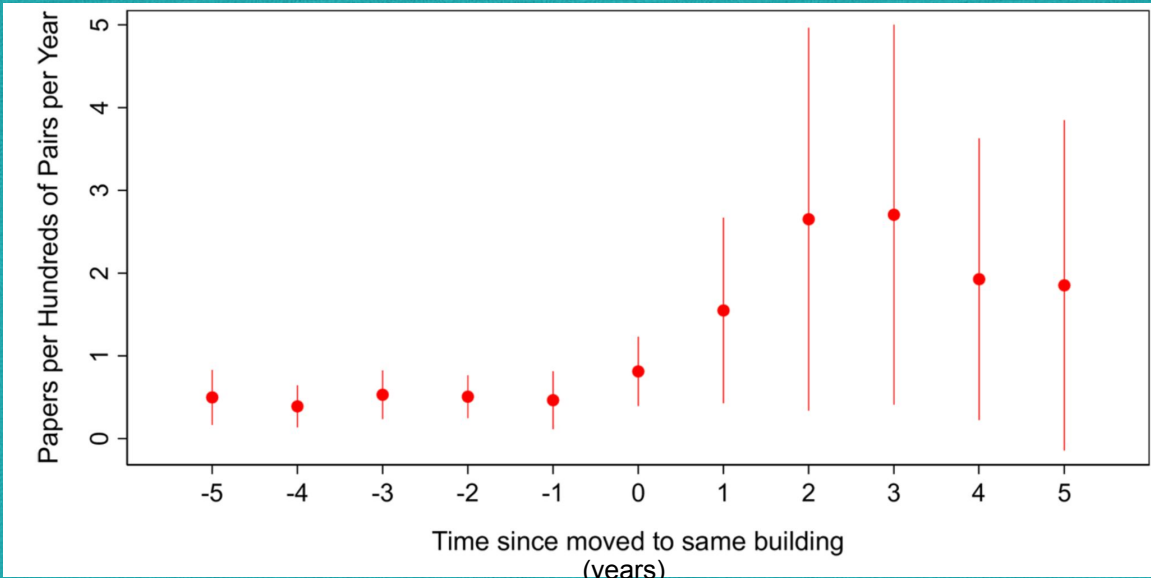
Hubs work because physical proximity drives collaboration (I)

Collaboration on Patents Amongst MIT Faculty
Depends on the Physical Distance Between Their Offices

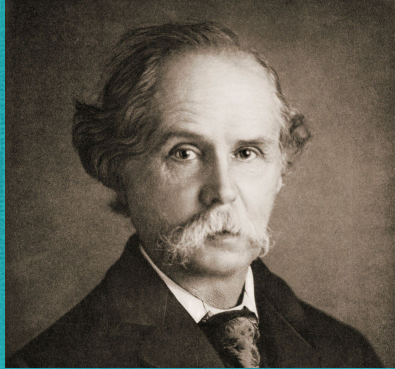


Hubs work because physical proximity drives collaboration (II)

*Collaboration on Research Papers Amongst MIT Faculty
Depends on the Physical Distance Between Their Offices*



This has long been understood



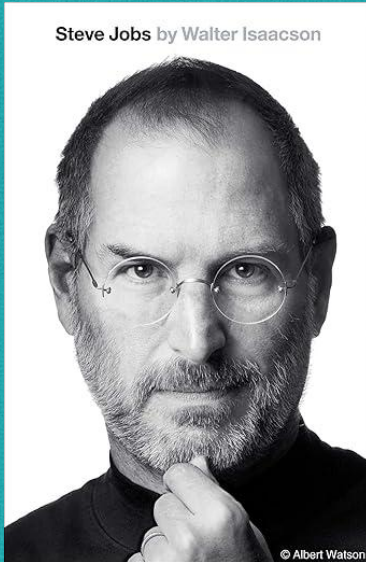
"Great are the advantages which people following the same skilled trade get from near neighbourhood to one another. The mysteries of the trade become no mysteries; but are as it were in the air... Good work is rightly appreciated, inventions and improvements in machinery, in processes and the general organization of the business have their merits promptly discussed; if one man starts a new idea it is taken up by others and combined with suggestions of their own; and thus becomes the source of yet more new ideas."

Principles of Economics

Professor Alfred Marshall, 1890

Cambridge University

And is no less true today

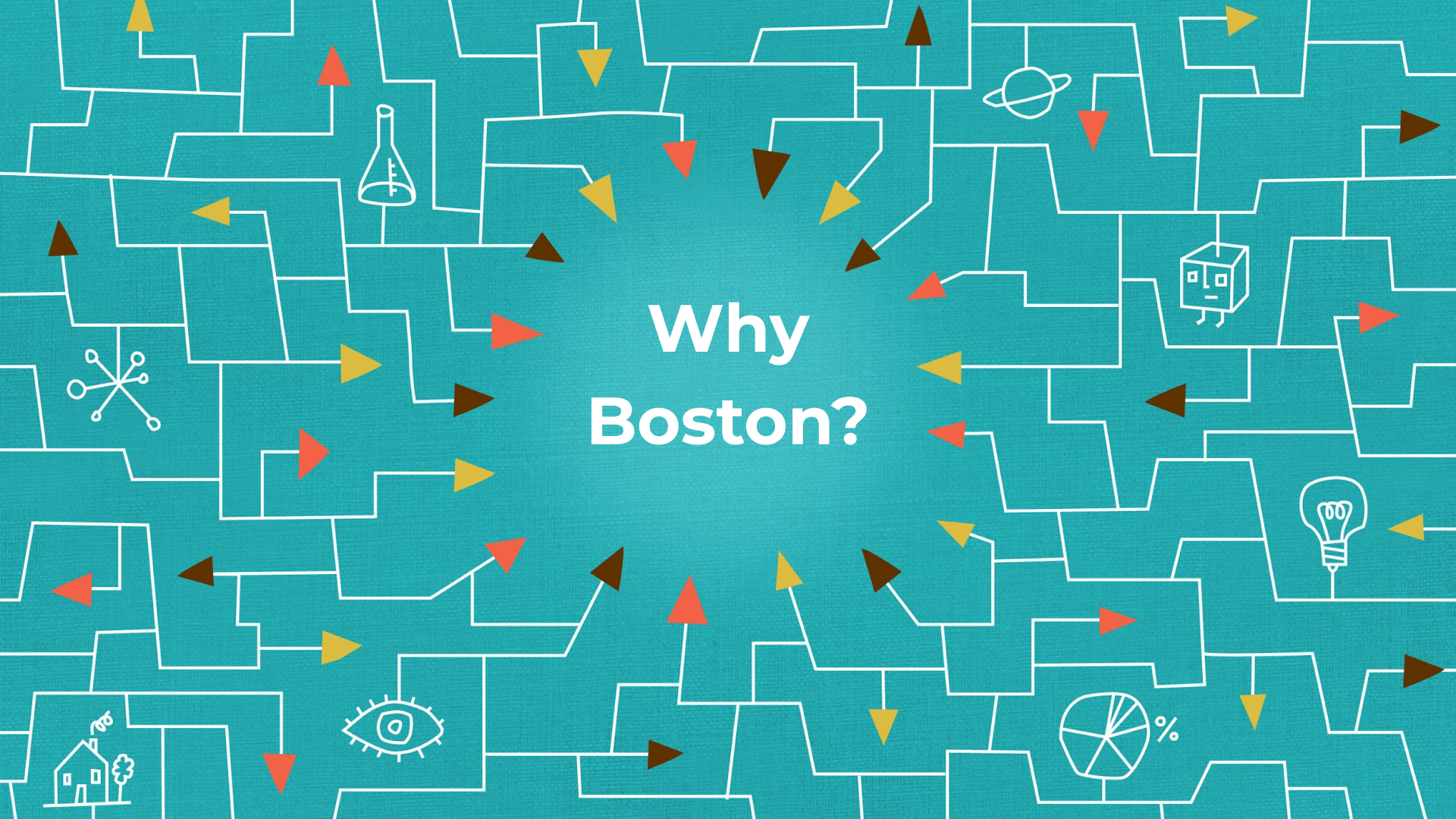


"Innovation comes from people meeting up in the hallways..."

There's a temptation in our networked age to think that ideas can be developed by email and iChat. That's crazy."

Steve Jobs, 1995 (quoted in Walter Isaacson's biography)

Why Boston?



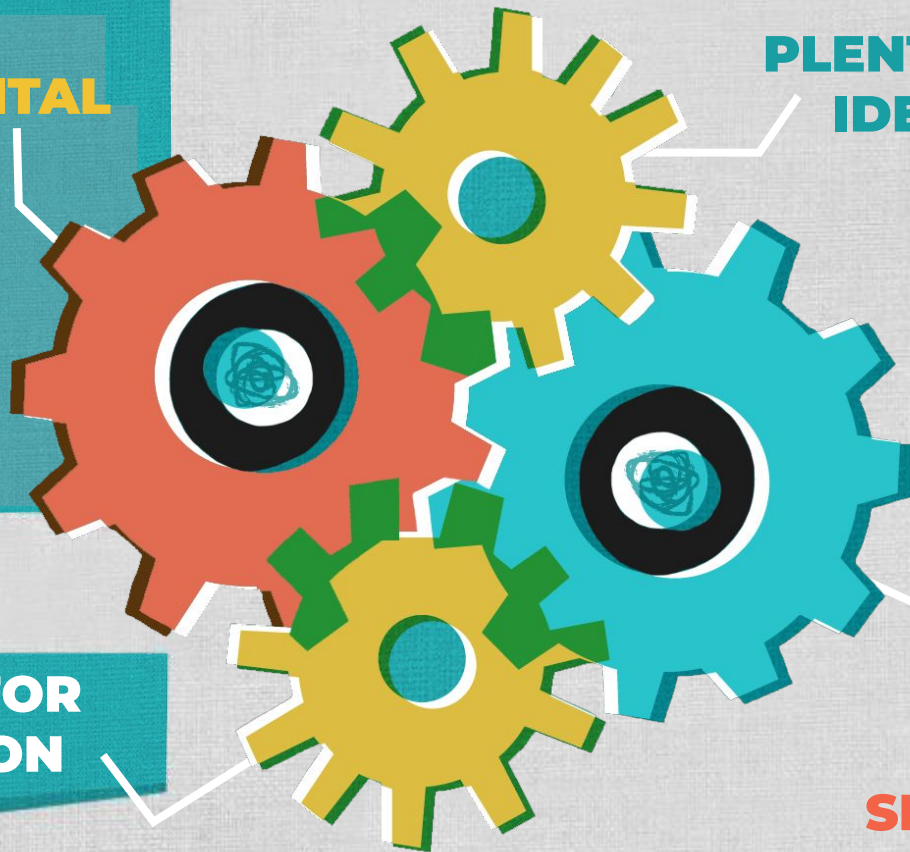
Massachusetts is home to a **thriving and top-ranked** innovation economy.

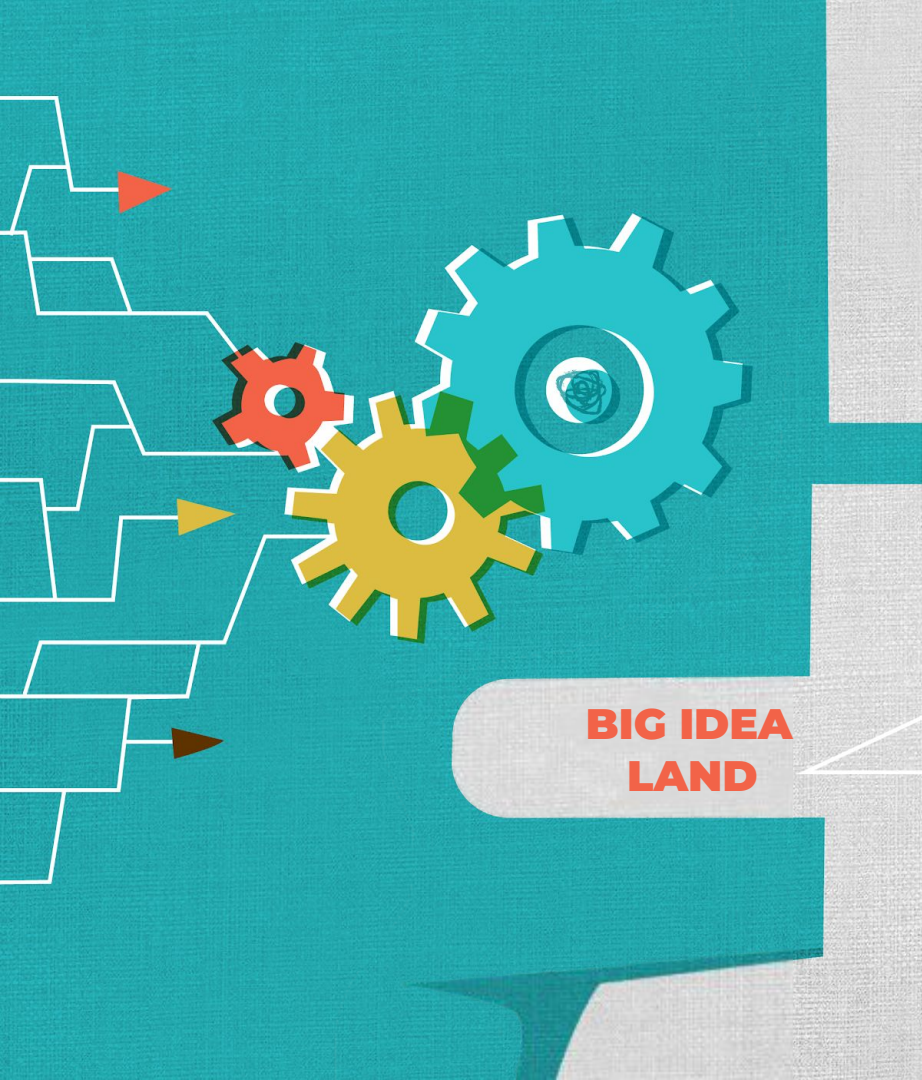
CAPITAL

**PLENTIFUL
IDEAS**

**PASSION FOR
INNOVATION**

**SKILLED
COLLABORATORS**



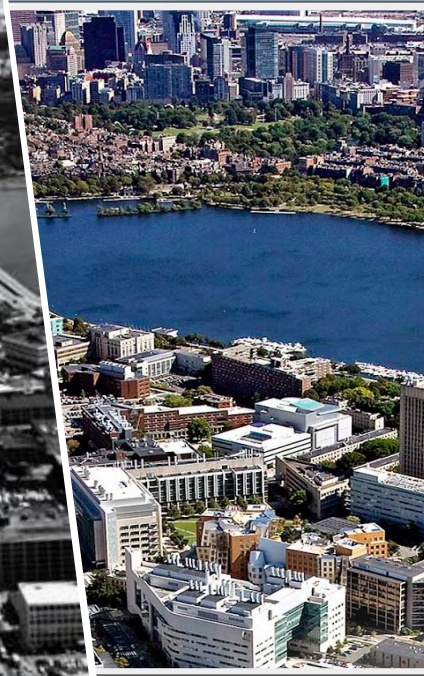
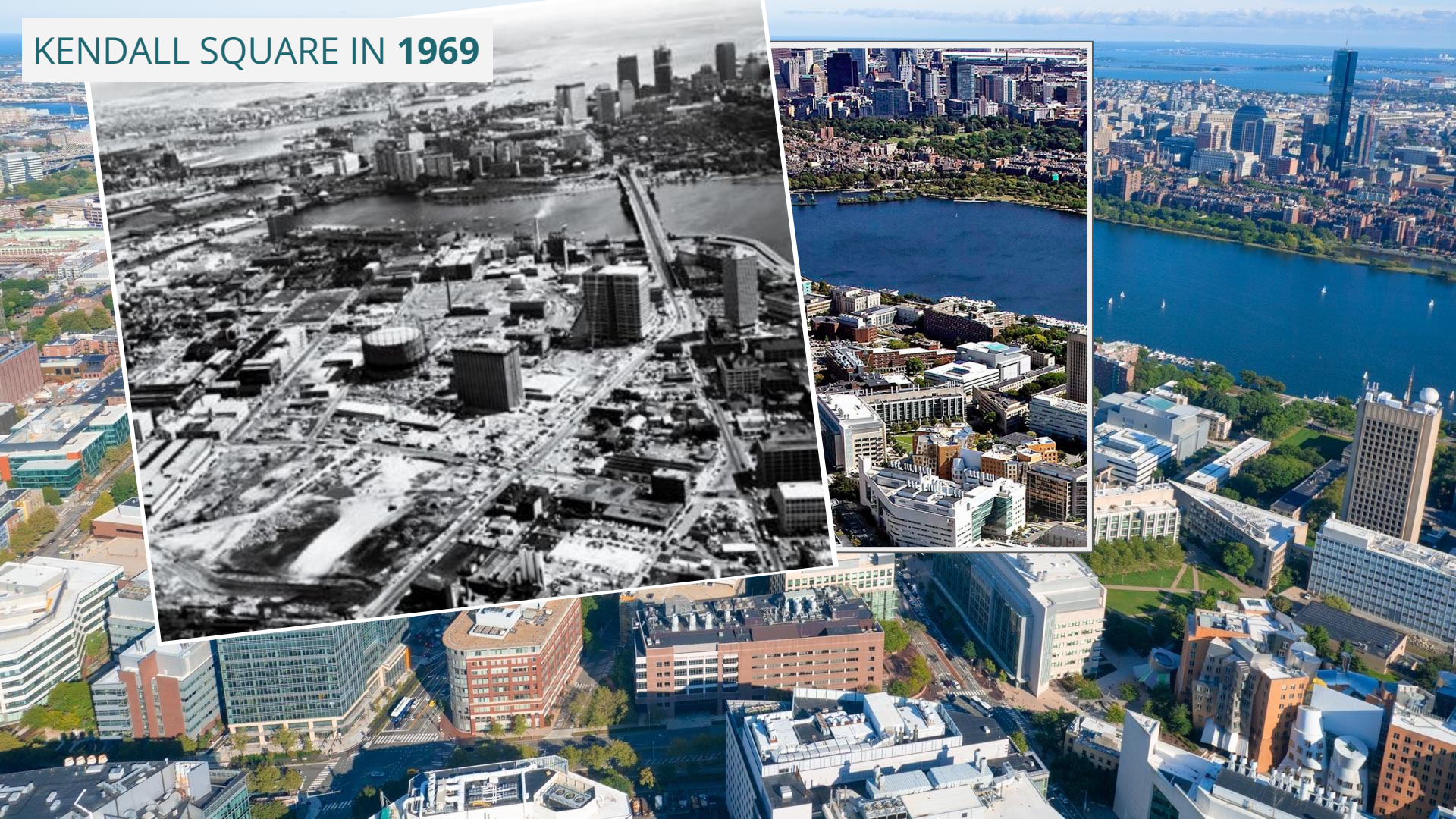


**BIG IDEA
LAND**



MIT alone generates **300**
companies per year. These
companies **have generated \$2**
trillion in sales

KENDALL SQUARE IN 1969



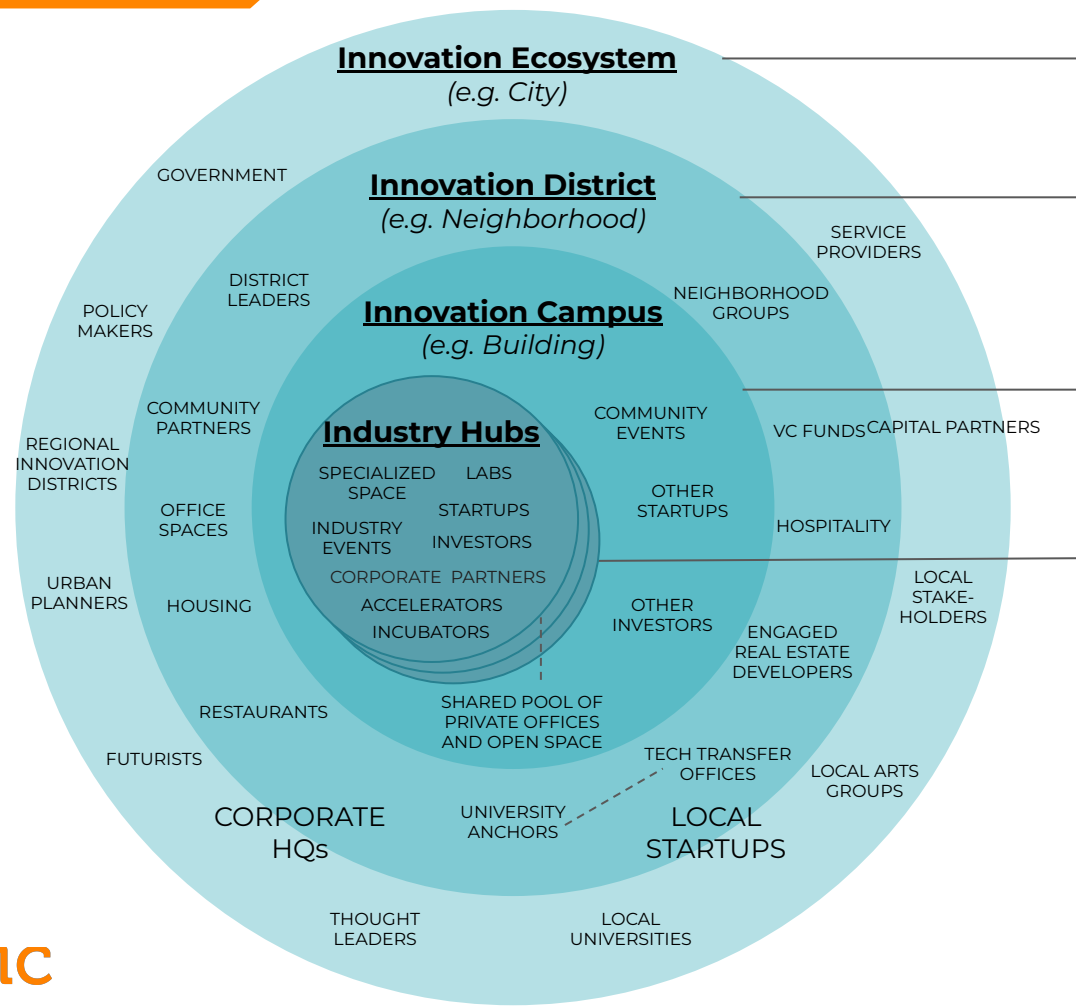
KENDALL SQUARE IN 2022





Current or former
CIC clients

ORANGE OUTLINES: FIRST OFFICE IN OUR REGION WAS AT CIC



An **innovation ecosystem** is comprised of ideas, developments and partnerships between startups, accelerators, entrepreneurs, governments and institutions in close proximity to each other.¹

An **innovation district** is a physically compact, transit-accessible, and tech-enabled geographic area with mixed-use amenities where leading-edge anchor institutions and companies cluster and connect with startups, business incubators and accelerators.² (here: Moffett Park Eco-Innovation District)

An **innovation campus** is a building or campus of buildings that provides high-quality spaces and shared resources for innovators. The campus acts as a curated center of gravity in the innovation district, concentrating diverse partners in a neutral, collaborative space.

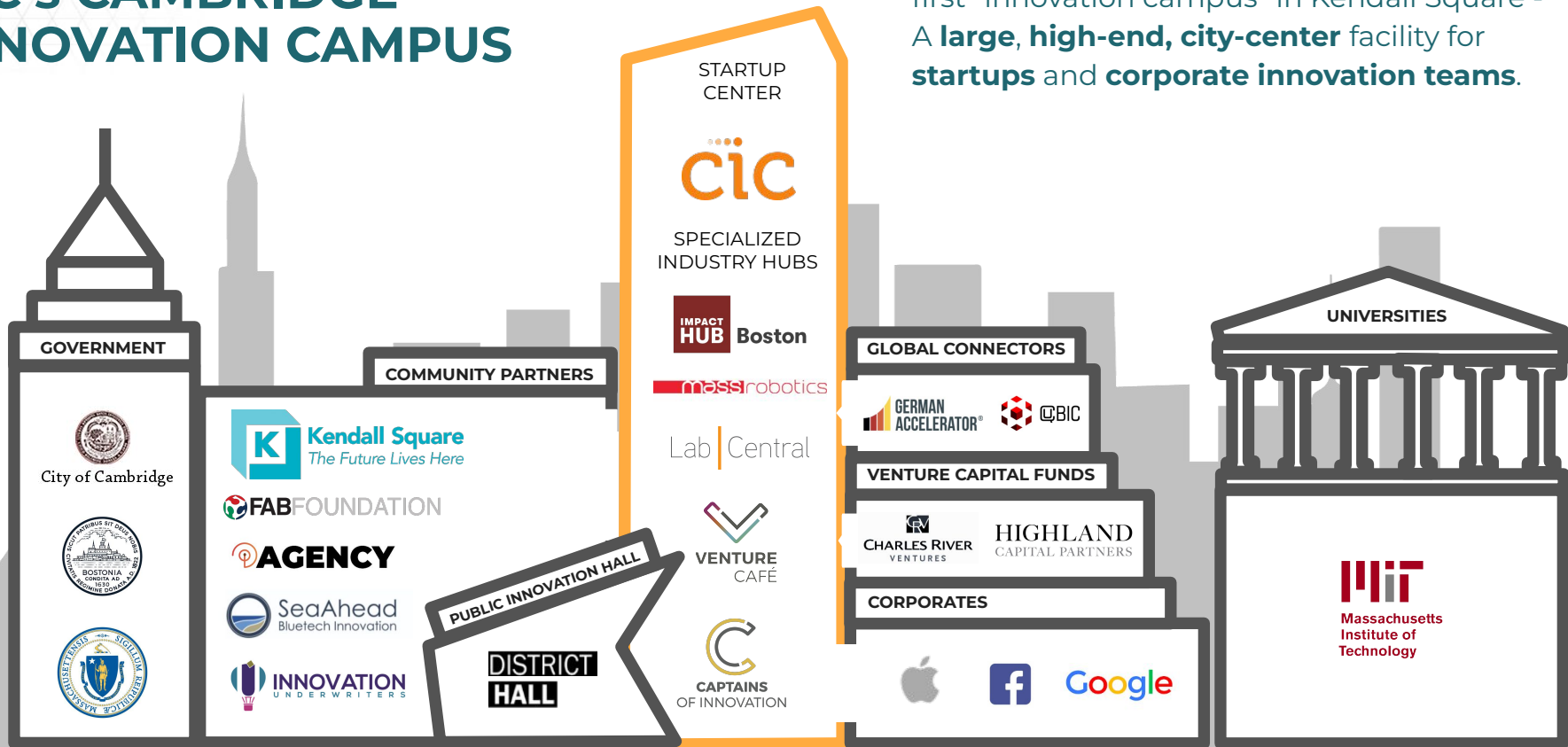
Industry hubs provide specialized space and community resources for innovators focused on an industry (i.e. robotics) or common goal (i.e. better aging for all). Industry hubs may include lab and prototyping space, dedicated staff, and bespoke programming beyond typical innovation campus services.

Coworking provides dedicated or non-dedicated flexible workspace. It can be used by companies at any stage, but is most frequently associated with early-stage startups and solo entrepreneurs.

Sources: 1. [Innovation Quarter](#)
2. [Brookings Institution](#)

EXAMPLE: CIC's CAMBRIDGE INNOVATION CAMPUS

In **1999**, MIT Sloan grads created the world's first "innovation campus" in Kendall Square - A **large, high-end, city-center** facility for **startups** and **corporate innovation teams**.



The hub concentrates startup activity

- Location** CIC Cambridge/CIC Boston
- Launched** 1999
- Campus size** ~670K SF (including affiliates)
- Specialized Facilities** Shared office, climate labs*, robotics/AI labs*, life science wet lab*, District Hall, Venture Café*
- Impact** MIT's New Enterprises Heat Map demonstrates the concentration of startup activity at CIC. Currently we have 940 clients across the CIC Cambridge and CIC Boston campus.



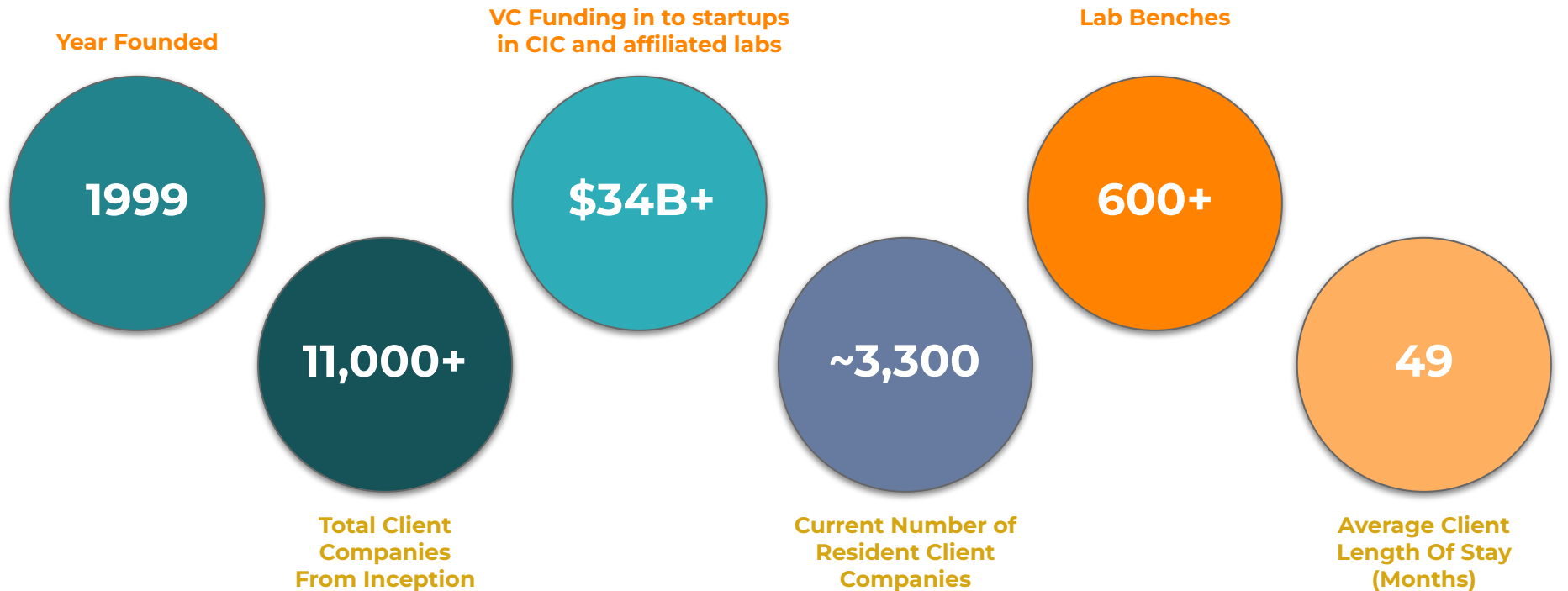
New Enterprises Heat Map

**Managed by partners that CIC was instrumental in founding*

CIC'S MISSION:

“Help Fix The World
Through Innovation.”

A legacy of impact



What this means for you as innovators

Leverage your community

Find ways to build links to other innovators

➡ Both within and beyond your field

The world is changing VERY fast

➡ Communities can help you keep up

Thank you!