



Building
Communities
of Innovation™

AURP 2026
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
DALLAS, TX – SEPT 29 - OCT 1

Hosted by  PEGASUS
PARK

**Call for Subject Matter Experts (SMEs)
2026 AURP International Conference
September 29-October 1**

Pegasus Park | Dallas, Texas

The Association of University Research Parks invites senior leaders, innovators, and practitioners to contribute to the 2026 International Conference at Pegasus Park - one of the nation's most dynamic, mission-driven innovation districts and a powerful example of how place-based strategy accelerates impact.

Hosted in Dallas, Texas, this year's conference will bring together AURP members and global innovation leaders for executive-level dialogue, high-value networking, and curated learning experiences. From strategic plenaries and collaborative working sessions to behind-the-scenes tours of Pegasus Park and engagement with the region's thriving life sciences community, the program will highlight how intentional investment, cross-sector partnerships, and research park leadership drive sustainable growth and long-term competitiveness within the U.S.

Pegasus Park stands at the forefront of advancing new industries—particularly in life sciences—while strengthening community outcomes. Together with AURP's mission to foster innovation, commercialization, and vibrant knowledge communities, the 2026 conference will showcase Dallas as a model for forward-looking ecosystem development.

SMEs are requested for submissions to lead high-impact discussions across five core tracks:

1. INNOVATION NETWORKS & PLACE-BASED STRATEGY

How modern research parks and innovation districts are evolving into engines of regional growth

This track explores the transformation of research parks and innovation districts into dynamic, place-based ecosystems that drive economic development, talent attraction, and industry clustering. Sessions will examine how these environments are strategically designed, programmed, and connected to amplify regional competitiveness in a rapidly evolving global economy.

Requested abstract topics include:

- **Innovation District Development & Ecosystem Design**
Deep dive into the planning and execution of innovation districts as integrated, mixed-use environments that foster collaboration among academia, industry, and government. Discussions will include strategies for developing *mega project-ready sites*, the critical role research parks play in attracting large-scale corporate investments, and how economic development organizations partner to position regions for success in competitive site selection processes.
- **Programming for Competitiveness Through University Assets**
Explore how universities serve as anchor institutions that fuel innovation ecosystems. Sessions will highlight replicable program models—incubators, accelerators, workforce pipelines, industry



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partnerships—and break down the key components required to design and sustain impactful programs. Case studies will showcase “how-to” approaches for building initiatives that translate research strengths into economic outcomes.

- **Reimagining the Modern Research Park**

Examine how research parks are evolving beyond traditional real estate models into vibrant, amenity-rich communities that prioritize connectivity, talent experience, and innovation culture. Learn from leading examples that are redefining governance, partnerships, placemaking, and long-term resilience.

- **Digital Infrastructure as Economic Catalyst: IXPs, BEAD & Data Centers**

Unpack the often-overlooked role of digital infrastructure—particularly Internet Exchange Points (IXPs) and federal programs like BEAD (Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment)—in enabling regional growth. Sessions will explore how broadband investment and data center development create downstream economic benefits, including business attraction, innovation capacity, and enhanced global connectivity.

2. CAPITAL, POLICY & THE INNOVATION ECONOMY:

The shifting landscape of investment and public policy shaping innovation

This track examines how capital flows, government policy, and emerging investment models are redefining the innovation economy. As public and private funding sources become increasingly interconnected, regions, institutions, and companies must navigate a more complex environment to access capital, scale technologies, and remain globally competitive.

Requested abstract topics include:

- **Venture & Angel Investment Trends**

Explore how early- and growth-stage capital markets are evolving, including shifts in venture capital strategies, the rise of sector-focused funds, and the expanding role of angel networks and syndicates. Discussions will highlight what investors are prioritizing today—from deep tech and climate to AI and life sciences—and how founders and ecosystems can better position themselves for funding.

- **Federal Funding as a Capital Stack**

Understand how federal programs are becoming a critical component of the innovation capital continuum. Sessions will unpack opportunities within DoD innovation programs, the implications of CHIPS and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), and pathways to scale through SBIR/STTR and related initiatives. Learn how to strategically align public funding with private investment to de-risk technologies and accelerate commercialization.

- **The New Era of Dual-Use Investment**

Examine the growing convergence of defense, commercial markets, and research ecosystems. This segment will explore how dual-use technologies are attracting new pools of capital, how startups can navigate defense and civilian applications simultaneously, and how regions can position themselves at the intersection of national security and economic growth.

- **Global Innovation & International Partnerships**

Analyze the role of cross-border collaboration in driving innovation. Sessions will cover strategies for building international partnerships, attracting foreign direct investment, and participating in global innovation networks, while also addressing geopolitical considerations and supply chain resilience.

- **Creative Financing Strategies**

Discover alternative and blended financing approaches that go beyond traditional venture capital, including public-private partnerships, revenue-based financing, infrastructure funding models, and



mission-driven investment vehicles. Learn how regions and organizations are structuring capital stacks to support long-term, inclusive innovation growth.

3. HIGH-GROWTH INDUSTRY CLUSTERS

Key sectors driving research park expansion and national competitiveness

This track explores the industry clusters at the forefront of research park growth and their critical role in shaping national and regional competitiveness. As technology convergence accelerates, research parks are becoming hubs for sector-specific innovation—bringing together talent, infrastructure, capital, and partnerships to scale breakthrough technologies and strengthen economic resilience.

Requested abstract topics include:

- **Life Sciences & Biotech Innovation**
Examine how research parks are supporting the rapid growth of life sciences through specialized infrastructure, wet lab development, translational research partnerships, and proximity to clinical ecosystems. Discussions will highlight strategies for attracting biotech companies, fostering university-industry collaboration, and advancing commercialization pipelines.
- **Semiconductors & Advanced Manufacturing**
Explore the resurgence of semiconductor investment and the role of research parks in supporting fabrication, supply chain development, and workforce readiness. Sessions will address the impact of national policies, regional strategies to build chip ecosystems, and the integration of advanced manufacturing technologies.
- **Artificial Intelligence & Multilingual Large Language Models**
Analyze the increasing presence of AI across innovation ecosystems, with a focus on how research parks are leveraging multilingual large language models (LLMs) to enhance research, commercialization, and global collaboration. Topics include AI-driven R&D, smart infrastructure, data ecosystems, and ethical considerations, as well as how AI is enabling cross-border innovation and expanding market access.
- **Aviation, Aerospace & National Defense**
Understand the intersection of aviation, space technologies, and defense innovation. This segment will explore how research parks are supporting aerospace clusters, defense-related R&D, and dual-use technologies, while fostering partnerships with federal agencies and private industry to drive national security and economic growth.
- **Critical Minerals & Rare Earth Energy Innovation**
Delve into the strategic importance of critical minerals and rare earth elements in powering next-generation technologies—from clean energy to electronics and defense systems. Sessions will examine supply chain challenges, sustainable extraction and processing, and the role of research parks in advancing materials innovation and energy resilience.

4. TALENT & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Building the workforce pipelines required for innovation economies to scale

This track focuses on the strategies, partnerships, and programs needed to develop, attract, and retain the skilled workforce essential for high-growth innovation sectors. As demand for specialized talent accelerates, regions must align education, industry, and community resources to create inclusive, future-ready workforce pipelines that support both emerging technologies and long-term economic resilience.



Requested abstract topics include:

- **Workforce Training Collaboratives in Biotech & Semiconductors**
Explore how cross-sector partnerships—bringing together community colleges, universities, employers, and nonprofit organizations—are designing and delivering targeted training programs for high-demand fields such as life sciences and semiconductor manufacturing. Sessions will highlight scalable models for curriculum development, hands-on training, credentialing, and rapid upskilling, as well as insights from employers on evolving workforce needs.
- **K–12 to Career Pathways**
Examine how early exposure and structured pathways are building the next generation of talent. Discussions will focus on STEM engagement, career awareness, dual enrollment, apprenticeships, and work-based learning opportunities that connect students to real-world innovation careers. Learn how regions are creating seamless pipelines from K–12 through postsecondary education into high-quality jobs.
- **University–Industry Talent Alignment**
Understand how universities and industry partners are working together to better align curricula, research opportunities, and workforce development with market demand—particularly in biotech and advanced manufacturing. Topics include co-op and internship models, industry-informed degree programs, talent retention strategies, and mechanisms for translating academic training into job-ready skills.
- **Inclusive & Regional Workforce Strategies**
Explore approaches to expanding access to innovation economy careers, including engaging underrepresented populations, leveraging community-based organizations, and addressing barriers to entry. Sessions will also highlight regional collaboration models that align workforce efforts across institutions and jurisdictions to maximize impact.

5. UNIVERSITY LEADERSHIP & TRANSLATIONAL IMPACT

This track examines how universities—particularly research-intensive institutions—are evolving as central drivers of innovation ecosystems. From advancing cutting-edge research to accelerating commercialization and regional economic growth, university leadership plays a pivotal role in translating discovery into real-world impact. Sessions will highlight how institutions are aligning strategy, partnerships, and infrastructure to maximize their influence at both the national and regional levels.

Requested abstract topics include:

- **Vice President for Research (VPR) Leadership & Strategy**
Gain insights into how VPRs and senior research leaders are shaping institutional priorities to enhance research competitiveness, interdisciplinary collaboration, and external engagement. Discussions will explore governance models, funding strategies, and approaches to building research portfolios that align with national priorities and regional economic needs.
- **Academic–Industry Partnerships**
Explore best practices for building and sustaining impactful collaborations between universities and industry. Sessions will cover models for sponsored research, co-development of technologies, industry-affiliated research centers, and long-term strategic partnerships that accelerate innovation while delivering mutual value.
- **Health Innovation Ecosystems**
Examine how universities are anchoring health and life sciences ecosystems through partnerships



with medical centers, startups, and industry. Topics include translational research, clinical trials infrastructure, biotech commercialization, and the integration of research, care delivery, and entrepreneurship to drive health outcomes and economic growth.

- **Corporate Engagement Strategies**

Learn how universities are deepening relationships with corporate partners to drive research, talent development, and innovation. Sessions will highlight approaches to corporate co-location within research parks, customized partnership models, industry advisory boards, and strategies for aligning corporate R&D with university capabilities.

- **Institutional Case Studies & Regional Impact**

Hear perspectives from leading institutions such as the University of Texas at Dallas and Rice University on how they are leveraging their research strengths, partnerships, and innovation assets to drive regional growth. Case studies will illustrate how universities are positioning themselves as anchors of innovation districts and catalysts for economic development.

Who Should Apply

We welcome participation from:

- CEOs and senior executives
- University presidents, provosts, and VPRs
- Industry and startup leaders
- Investors and capital providers
- Government and economic development officials

Submission Focus

Proposals should emphasize:

- Actionable insights and replicable models
- Cross-sector collaboration (industry, university, government)
- Scalable approaches to innovation and workforce development
- Real-world case studies and measurable outcomes

Join us in shaping the future of innovation ecosystems at Pegasus Park and contributing to the next generation of research park leadership.

Submit your interest to participate as an AURP Subject Matter Expert.

For more 2026 International Conference details check out our website:

<https://aurp.org/education/international/>

For questions, contact:

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