

## Illinois' Smart Agenda

Illinois has great potential to be prosperous and make enormous contributions to our state, national, and international communities. Prosperity in today's world economy depends on innovation: being first to market products and services based on new knowledge and the ability to apply that knowledge.

The capacity to discover, create and market depends heavily on Illinois' prowess in science and technology, and upon an ecosystem of public programs and practices which facilitate commercializing technology. Illinois' current practices and programs, taken as a whole, fail to adequately serve an innovation agenda, and in many cases work against it.

Instead of assigning blame for Illinois' current dysfunction, we need look for partners with whom to pursue a *Smart Agenda*<sup>TM (1)</sup> for our state, one which outlines the basic things state government must do. We also should collaborate with other states in the Midwest to compete as an economic region. Once the *Smart Agenda* is adopted and adhered to consistently, Illinois will:

1. Manage its fiscal affairs with integrity, fund operations out of current revenues, and use general obligation bond financing only for major long term projects and true crisis situations.
2. Upgrade and maintain its physical transportation and communications infrastructure, including the provision of accessible broadband access state wide.
3. Conduct permitting and other business regulatory processes in a manner that is both welcoming of new / expanded enterprises and as capable, timely and transparent as any in the world.
4. Undertake an economic development effort which includes a competitive package of support programs for science-based emerging and innovative firms, one that allows Illinois to translate its above average research capabilities into commercially viable new businesses and keep them here.
5. Educate its students to achieve reading, math and science scores on a par with the top 10% of students in the world's industrialized nations, and, in the process:
  - Eliminate geographic and race-based disparities in funding of public schools
  - Establish an educational standard for innovation skills development through problem-based learning
  - Maintain curricula in fundamental manufacturing, building and trade skills to ensure a workforce with the diverse skill sets required for robust and diverse economic performance
6. Become the first US state in which the African American and Latino portion of the workforce engaged in science-based enterprises matches the proportion of those population sectors statewide.

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<sup>1</sup> iBIO has trademarked the term *Smart Agenda*, and purchased the URL [www.smartagenda.org](http://www.smartagenda.org) for eventual use by and pro bono transfer to a coalition supporting the agenda and/or to the State of Illinois itself for use as a marketing tool.

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7. Fund state schools of higher education so that Illinois is widely recognized as among the top 5 states in the nation for research in agriculture, the life sciences, physical sciences, and computer/communications technology.

The following paragraphs explain why each of these seven elements is needed for Illinois to reach its potential:

1. *Fiscal integrity.* Healthy finances provide certainty that state will perform necessary tasks as a matter of course—providing for infrastructure, education, and essential state services—and that businesses and citizens will not be subjected to chronic fiscal fire drills or short-changed on basic government functions.

2. *Infrastructure and broadband.* Maintenance of public infrastructure is essential to the economic well-being of any jurisdiction. Broadband, the key to effective communications within communities and between businesses, is now an essential component of public infrastructure; it needs to be extended state-wide.

3. *Regulatory responsiveness.* Illinois' business-facing regulatory apparatus is purely reactive, unacceptably slow, and negatively affected by political meddling, costing the state jobs and prosperity. We need instead to seek out companies proactively, streamline regulatory processes, properly staff them, and eliminate political interference unrelated to regulatory standards.

4. *Support for startups.* Study after study has documented the fact that although Illinois possesses above average research capabilities, it is chronically below-average at translating that prowess into new companies, and keeping the companies we create from drifting off to other states. Incentive programs for small companies must be created so that we stop losing firms to the coasts, and to states like Michigan, Wisconsin and Indiana.

5. *World-class education.* Today's students will compete not just with workers from other parts of the U.S., but with those around the world. According to recent test surveys documented by the National Academies of Science, American students' test scores chronically lag those of other developed countries, placing in one survey in the lowest 10% of math and lowest 5% of science scores.

In order to give Illinois' students a chance to compete effectively we must raise their abilities compete with the top students internationally. For this to happen, we must:

- Eliminate the well documented disparities based on race and geography, so that where or into which race a student is born no longer predetermines his or her opportunity for a quality education.
- Teach students how to solve problems in teams. According to Chris Koch, Illinois' State Superintendent of Schools, there is abundant literature validating the proposition that when students can see the application of what they are learning, they learn to create solutions and learn core subject matter better and faster.
- Focus additional efforts to provide training for manufacturing, construction and trade skills to help maintain the strong manufacturing base in Illinois. Illinois simply can not afford to suffer the loss of manufacturing that other Midwestern states have experienced. Providing a highly capable workforce for our industrial base is essential to keeping that base competitive on a global scale.

6. *Workforce diversity.* Reliance on a workforce for innovation which draws only on suburban white and Asian students guarantees that a huge percentage of the talents, skills, and energy of our population will be lost or employed in low skilled jobs. Illinois cannot afford that kind of internal brain drain, and our state can gain a huge advantage by bringing all our citizens into the innovation-focused talent pool.

7. *Funding basic research.* The most prosperous regions of the US and beyond—other than those relying on vast oil resources—are jurisdictions that have mastered the ability to translate basic discovery into new products and services. Fundamental to that process is leadership in basic research, historically an Illinois strength.