



The Oklahoma City Brain Trust

March 23, 2011

## Introduction

On March 23, 2011, CEOs for Cities, the City of Oklahoma City and the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber convened the Oklahoma City Brain Trust, a cross-sector group of 25-30 urban leaders who engaged in a robust discussion of the trends shaping the future of cities, how Oklahoma City is likely to fare in light of these trends and if the local civic agenda needs to shift in response to these trends.

Further, we explored what it means to be a world class city – one of those special places we’ve lived in or traveled to that have left indelible imprints on our experiences and memories – and asked ourselves what it would take for Oklahoma City to be listed among them.

After opening remarks by Carol Coletta, President & CEO of CEOs for Cities, a panel of local business leaders responded to questions about Oklahoma City’s strengths, weaknesses and opportunities. A facilitated group dialogue followed in which all Brain Trust participants were able to suggest the three most important actions Oklahoma City leaders ought to take to shape the city for the future. Results are presented in this report.

The Oklahoma City Brain Trust is a program of the US Initiative, a civic movement to imagine a new kind of future for urban life in America. The US Initiative was launched in 2010 by CEOs for Cities with support from The Rockefeller Foundation and advances the work of the CEOs for Cities network of corporations, universities, foundations and cultural institutions with a comprehensive public engagement campaign.

Outcomes of the Oklahoma City Brain Trust will be compiled and put to use in national publications related to the project, including a book to be published by The Rockefeller Foundation.



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There are three factors that make cities work:

**Quality of Talent**

**Quality of Place**

**Quality of Opportunity**

And without leadership, none of these can be realized.



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**Oklahoma City is a place of opportunity, but we can be more.**

Oklahoma City has long represented a push to the west; a push toward opportunity. But to measure a city's Quality of Opportunity we ask: Is this an open city? Do I feel welcome here? Can I put my talent to work? Can I connect with others who will make my work better and my life richer?

According to the latest data available, Oklahoma City has at least two strong indicators that suggest one can put their talent to work there. The city ranks 14th in self-employment and 15th in entrepreneurship among the top 51 metro areas in the country. But we also know that wages, productivity and entrepreneurship rise with density. That's because in an innovation economy, nothing is more valuable than accelerating the transfer of ideas. Proximity facilitates that.

This is where Oklahoma City faces challenges.

Oklahoma City's geographic footprint is large, very large. At approximately 621 square miles, it is five times the size of Atlanta but only a quarter as dense. Even Houston, at 601 square miles, is four times as dense as Oklahoma City. Density unnerves many city leaders, but its value is increasingly clear. Cities are nothing if not dense collections of people that enable the connections and creativity that spur innovation and job growth. The degree to which Oklahoma City is able to facilitate connections and innovation across large expanses of space will be critical to its future as a city of opportunity.



## Where do the biggest opportunities lie for gaining competitive advantage?

The energy sector is Oklahoma City's biggest competitive advantage for attracting talent and generating high wage jobs. But well-established firms like Devon Energy and SandRidge Energy aren't just competing with Houston for the top graduates in this field; they're competing with Brazil and Spain and the UAE. So why pick Oklahoma City? Larry Nichols, Chairman & CEO of Devon Energy, indicated cost and ease of living, as well as affordable homeownership, as the driving factors recruits cite for choosing Oklahoma City.

We also know that young adults with a four-year college degree are 105 percent – more than twice – as likely to live within three miles of a Central Business District in metro areas nationwide, a growing trend that has persisted for four decades. In all but 16 of the top 51 metro areas, this trend held true over the last decade. Oklahoma City was one of the outliers. City leaders must acknowledge this trend if it intends to keep its competitive advantage over cities that offer more compact, walkable urban neighborhoods – the kind 85 percent of Millennials say they want to live in.

But there's another way to boost Oklahoma's Quality of Talent.

If it is like most cities, Oklahoma City would pull out all stops to attract a billion dollar business to its city. And yet, the city is sitting on nearly a billion dollars in potential personal income already. The latest figures available show that only 26.4 percent of Oklahoma City's population has a 4-year college degree or better, putting it in the bottom half of the top 50 metros. If Oklahoma City could increase that just one percentage point – just one – it would produce an additional \$900 million in personal income to the metro region. That's Oklahoma City's Talent Dividend, and achieving it would offer a strong competitive advantage to the city.



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# Metro Variation in College Attainment

Source: 2008 ACS



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## **There are some strengths to build on.**

Oklahoma City and its mayor, Mick Cornett, have gained national attention for health initiatives that include the famous city-wide diet launched in response to the city's obesity ranking in 2007. Perhaps lesser known but equally as remarkable, the city voted in favor of a one-cent sales tax to fund an ambitious capital improvement program for new and upgraded sports, recreation, entertainment, cultural and convention facilities. The Metropolitan Area Projects (MAPS), as it is known, is believed to be the first public of its size in the country.

MAPS, now in its third iteration, continues the momentum while upholding the original goals of job creation and improving the quality of life for citizens of Oklahoma City. MAPS 3 is also aspirational; as Oklahoma City continues to explore what it means to be world-class, projects championed within the MAPS framework are developed to respond accordingly.

There are two powerful examples of how this aspiration is being met, both of which were elevated at the Brain Trust. The first is the successful bid for the Oklahoma City Thunder, the NBA franchise that relocated from Seattle in part due to the Oklahoma City's NBA quality arena (a result of the first round of MAPS funding). The Thunder qualified for their first playoffs during the 2009–2010 season and won their first division title as the Thunder in the 2010-11 season.

The second example relates to one of the city's natural assets – the Oklahoma River. Day-lighted with first-round MAPS funding, it's uniquely straight course and urban location has made it increasingly valuable to the sport of rowing. Devon Energy sponsored the design and construction of a \$10 million boathouse and training center, which is now home to the Oklahoma City University rowing and kayaking teams and will also serve as an Olympic training facility. This investment was referred to by Devon Energy president Larry Nichols as an investment in the future.

One thing is clear: Oklahoma City is not the same city it was 10 years ago, and if it continues to build on these strengths, it will see ongoing reinvention in the next decade.



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**What are the three most important actions we need to take as a community?**



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**1. Invest in the future leadership of Oklahoma City by engaging the next generation now.**

Today, civic leadership in Oklahoma City is strong, particularly among the private sector business community represented at the Brain Trust. But in order to ensure this legacy continues, Oklahoma City needs to invest in future leaders. Brain Trust participants hope to cultivate multi-generational leadership models by identifying companies willing to commit the next ten years to Oklahoma City and then mentoring young leaders within that base. This strategy leverages city leaders as mentors for those who will ultimately be responsible for building on the city's momentum. The trick will be tenure. A ten-year commitment may be reasonable for companies, but the average employment tenure for 25-34 year olds is 3 years and only 5 years for 35-44 year olds. That's why Quality of Place is so important. It sticks people to communities.

**2. Use placemaking initiatives to improve the health of the community.**

Building on the success of the MAPS program, Brain Trust participants support enhancing Quality of Place in Oklahoma City as a means of improving the health of the community and managing growth. MAPS 3, a short-term sales tax initiative aimed at funding city projects including a streetcar, new convention center, downtown park and wellness and recreation centers will impact the overall health and vibrancy of the city by encouraging walking, running, rowing and cycling. Ultimately, Brain Trust participants would like to see the next round of MAPS projects aimed at improving art and culture. Through more public-private partnerships like MAPS and an increased emphasis on health and wellness, Oklahoma City participants agree that a walkable city with rich amenities increases quality of life and the urban core.

**3. Invest in the future – our people.**

Devon Energy chairman Larry Nichols described his firm's investment in the Devon Boathouse as an important investment in the future of the city because of its potential to create economic spinoffs. Oklahoma City must use the same rationale to argue for the development talent. By recruiting and supporting strong education leadership, and then pairing them with business and industry mentors, Brain Trust participants hope to improve the primary and secondary education system in Oklahoma City. This talent development strategy is an investment – indeed an expensive one – in the future of Oklahoma City.



Responses from Facilitated Group Dialogue

**Talent**

Build in strengths of energy, aerospace, high tech, and bioscience clusters

Concentrate on K-12 education

Create partnerships between industry and education

Engage talent by diversifying the economy

Absorb talent

**Place**

Housing for 25-34 year olds

Connectivity/Transit

Housing/retail mix

Better urban core through rejuvenation

Market-rate housing in downtown core

Building venues for healthy lifestyles (e.g. rec centers and bike paths)

Creating walkability

Use MAPS 4 to build arts and culture

Manage growth beyond infrastructure

**Leadership**

Private sector leadership

Strength of Mayor Cornett

Develop mentor program for young leaders

Foster commitment to Oklahoma City

Create a new attitude for leaders



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### Oklahoma City Brain Trust Participants:

Mark Beffort, Grubb & Ellis/Levy Beffort  
The Honorable Mick Cornett, City of Oklahoma City  
Jim Couch, City of Oklahoma City  
Pete Delaney, OGE Energy Corp  
Carl Edwards, Price Edwards & Co  
Amber Egnor, Greater Oklahoma City Chamber  
Mark Funke, Bank of Oklahoma  
Bryan Gonterman, AT&T Oklahoma  
David Harlow, BancFirst  
Rhonda Hooper, Jordan Associates  
Christopher D. Howard, SSM Health Care of Oklahoma  
David Jackson, JPMorganChase Bank  
Robin Roberts Krieger, Greater Oklahoma City Chamber  
Bruce Lawrence, INTEGRIS Health  
Greg Love, Loves travel Stops & Country Stores  
Steve Mason, Cardinal Engineering, Inc.  
Tom J. McDaniel, Oklahoma City University  
Mary Melon, The Journal Record Publishing Company  
Gary Nelson, The Nelson Family Foundation  
Larry Nichols, Devon Energy Corporation  
Ray Vaughn, Oklahoma County  
Tom Ward, SandRidge Energy, Inc.



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**Are you with  ?**

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