

## Innovation Districts and Ecosystems

The Key Cities Innovation Network Conference at i-PLACE 25  
University of Salford, 27 November 2025 10:00–16:00

# Call for Papers

The Key Cities Innovation Network will hold its fourth annual conference at the University of Salford, on the innovation theme “Innovation Districts and Ecosystems”, as part of the two-day i-PLACE 25 event in partnership with BEYOND Conference.

To survive, cities must continually reinvent themselves. To thrive, they must craft a sustainable strategy that channels their assets and understands their position in the world. Innovation is central both to survival and success, but how is it best used to drive resilience and growth in our cities, towns and communities?

The Steering Group invites submissions of 1,000-1,500 words presenting innovative work relating to this theme, demonstrating civic partnership with local authorities and/or other place stakeholders.

Areas of interest include, but are not limited to:

- *Is your innovation scalable, developed in partnership within your city or region (and potentially with similar partnerships in other places), and demonstrating the potential for innovation districts and ecosystems for achieving beneficial impacts? What works well and what are the challenges?*
- *What are the barriers to innovation and how have you addressed them?*
- *Innovation often happens at the intersections and meeting places – for example, including business, social change, digital, environmental and health. How easy is it to promote innovative interaction across boundaries and how have you approached this?*
- *What potential is there for publishing, sharing/replicating more widely, and taking the work forward?*
- *How can the innovation be sustained?*

Contributors will be invited to make a brief presentation about their submission at the conference and following the conference, they will be invited to develop their submission into an evidenced paper of around 5,000 words which will be peer-reviewed prior to publication in the third edition of KCIN's Urban Innovation compendium in April 2026.

(The first, published in April 2024 on ‘Civic Partners in Net Zero’, is [here](#). The second, published in May 2025 on ‘Culture, Place and Development’, is [here](#).)

The conference will also hear from keynote speakers with opportunities for questions and answers and there will be a plenary discussion about the theme.

## Conference programme

Details of the conference programme on 27 November and events the previous day, including speakers, will be announced when available. For the latest information, see the conference website at <https://i-PLACE.uk> where you can also sign up to receive automatic updates.

## Context

Over the last half-century, we have increasingly come to understand cities as living organisms. “Instead of thinking of cities as spaces, places, locations,” the urban theorist Michael Batty wrote in ‘The New Science of Cities’ (MIT Press, 2013), “we need to think of them as actions, interactions and

transactions that generate (social and economic) wealth.” But what has not changed is that for cities to survive, they cannot stand still and must continually innovate.

Thinking what form that takes in different urban contexts – particularly for communities and equitable development – has moved on since Katz and Wagner wrote “The Rise of Innovation Districts” (The Brookings Institution, 2014), building on the ideas of Richard Florida in “The Rise of the Creative Class” (Basic Books, 2002).

What is the potential of innovation districts, zones and ecosystems in the 25 Key Cities, none of which feature in the current membership of the UK Innovation Districts Group? Many Key Cities, working in partnership with their universities, industry and communities, see innovation as central to their strategy of place and crucial to inclusive growth.

i-PLACE 25 is an opportunity to give these questions serious consideration with real-world projects, case studies and evidenced ideas.

The ambition for the conference and compendium is to stimulate opportunities for impactful, funded research, innovation and collaboration across the network to drive positive and scalable development in the Key Cities and across the country.

Up to two delegate places per member university are reserved whether or not presenting, additional places subject to availability. Key Cities member authorities and Parliamentarians will be invited to register via the Key Cities Secretariat and the APPG.

### **Key dates**

19/09/2025	Call for Papers Response Deadline Information required: Who will attend? If submitting a presentation, provide the title, description and partners. Send to: <a href="mailto:secretariat@keycitiesinnovation.org">secretariat@keycitiesinnovation.org</a>
06/11/2025	Abstracts for presentation: 1,000-1,500-word submission.
27/11/2024	Conference
19/01/2026	Submissions of post-conference, evidenced papers
Feb 2026	Peer review process
Mar 2026	Editorial production
Apr 2026	Publication and Westminster launch

Issued on behalf of the Key Cities Innovation Network:

### **Professor Nic Beech**

Vice-Chancellor of the University of Salford and Conference Host

### **Steering Group**

Professor Shirley Congdon, Vice-Chancellor, University of Bradford  
Professor Jane Falkingham, Vice-President, University of Southampton  
Professor Nic Beech, Vice-Chancellor, University of Salford  
Joanne Dobson, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Coventry University

### **Programme Director**

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