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How Investments in Innovation Districts Can Combat the Country's Regional Divides.

Last month, Robert D. Atkinson of the Information Technology & Innovation Foundation, together with our colleagues Mark Muro and Jacob Whiton, published a report calling for a renewed federal role in helping to balance the country's growing geographic inequities. "The case for growth centers: How to spread tech innovation across America" carefully documents how and why the innovation economy—the driver of much of the nation's growth—has become increasingly concentrated in a handful of coastal metropolitan areas, leaving much of the heartland struggling to keep pace. It also proposes a way for leaders in Washington, D.C. to boost lagging regions by selecting a small group of "growth center" metro areas (chosen via a competitive process) to receive a package of federal supports.

The "growth center" construct was originally conceived in the 1950s, but this 21st century version acknowledges that in today's economy, federal support for more widespread diffusion of innovative activity will not be enough to combat the entrenched economic divergence between regions. Rather, such "top-down" investment needs to be matched with "bottom-up" leadership, drive, and capacity to make the kinds of transformative investments in places and placemaking essential for growth centers to thrive.

Continue reading.

The Brookings Institution

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Thursday, January 23, 2020