Leadership + Innovation
- Confrarna
- Concreto SPURS
- Poder Pacifico

Measuring + documenting (TA)
* Austral entrepreneurship
* Mexico participatory eval
* Community guides (PR)

- Project Development

Components

1. Community Innovation Curriculum leadership + innovation

2. Documenting Innovation approaches to region

3. Transnational learning

MITCoLab
Community Innovators Lab

Annual Report
2013-2014
A Santa Fe train car used as a tapestry for public art. Photo Credit: Natasha Balwit. Related CoLab Radio blogpost – Street Art of Santa Fe Read here: http://colabradio.mit.edu/street-art-of-santa-fe/
Deep social inequities, environmental degradation and injustice, and democratic deficits of growth-driven models of development – here in the U.S., and around the world - have brought us to a point of economic and environmental crisis. Many forms of societal exclusion – racism, xenophobia, bias against poor people and women – stand in the way of systems innovation.

At CoLab, we see widespread systems failure as an opportunity to bring the knowledge and experiences of people living at society’s margins to the center of the innovation process, experiment with new development paradigms and nurture alternative ways of building community wealth and well-being.

Across the planet, we face many inter-related questions. What does it take to organize economies to improve human and ecosystem well-being? Who will decide how resources are used, and by what process? What is our role as citizens? The answers look different in the Bronx, Malaysia, Massachusetts or Nicaragua, and they aren’t self-evident: they’re emergent, and depend on inclusive, robust and democratic inquiry and discourse. Together with our students, faculty, alumni, and community partners CoLab is working to discover new ways innovation in socially-marginalized communities can benefit all.

Thank you for your partnership in, and support of, this important work,

Dayna Cunningham
Executive Director
VISION
CoLab supports communities working on equitable, democratic and sustainable development in the U.S. and internationally.

MISSION STATEMENT
CoLab uses the planning discipline to connect MIT faculty, staff and students with civic leaders and community members to co-create innovative solutions to the complex challenges of urban sustainability.

Three premises provide the foundation for CoLab’s work:

• Planning is a participatory discipline
• Marginalized communities possess critical experience, insights and knowledge for driving innovation and addressing systems failures.
• Collaborative innovation is the most effective way to generate sustainable solutions to local and global problems.

WORK
Together with MIT students, faculty and community partners, CoLab is testing and refining our “Sweet Spot” approach to urban planning: democratic engagement within communities to co-create models of urban resilience and shared wealth generation. The goal of this approach is to build local economies that provide the means for even the most marginalized to lead healthy and dignified lives.

Four essential methods enable our work:
• Model-building and technical support
• Collaborative research and inquiry
• Linking and leadership development
• Media and culture

CoLab and our community partners work together to reflect, sharpen, document and share ideas. Privileging perspectives from the margin in theory-building and strategy development sets our work apart from other forms of university engagement with communities.
CoLab develops operational models of urban sustainability that are participatory and generate shared wealth. Our efforts currently center on energy efficiency, waste management and wellness-based development.
COMPREHENSIVE PARTICIPATORY EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT: BRONX COOPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE (BCDI)

The Bronx, NY is the poorest urban county in the US, with some of the worst health and education outcomes. Yet it is home to hospitals, educational and other "anchor" institutions with annual procurement budgets in the billions; highly successful commercial corridors; and one of the world’s largest fresh food distribution centers. The Bronx’s plentiful assets are being extracted and invested elsewhere.

BCDI, a partnership between CoLab and Bronx organizing, workforce development, environmental justice and other groups, seeks to stem the flow of wealth from the Bronx and reinvest it to build shared decision-making, ownership and wealth at scale.

In 2014:

- BCDI began developing a local business procurement platform that will help localize procurement by allowing major Bronx institutions to identify and contact local vendors, and by facilitating electronic transactions and providing business support services to vendors.
- In partnership with Emerald Cities Collaborative, BlocPower, and NWBCCC, BCDI launched two new energy projects—energy efficiency retrofits of local faith-based institutions and the development of a community-owned microgrid—in order to address the Bronx’s energy security crisis and provide opportunities for community wealth-building.
- BCDI is developing a collaboration with Mondragon University, 1worker1vote.org, and the CUNY School of Law’s Community & Economic Development Clinic to create a curriculum in Social Economy and Cooperative Enterprise.

WASTE MANAGEMENT IN CENTRAL AMERICA AND INDIA

Keeping trash out of the oceans is a worldwide challenge. On remote islands in Nicaragua and Panama, cooperatives of wastepickers and indigenous communities are pioneering waste collection systems grounded in local cultural norms while building their own livelihoods. Organic and sanitary waste streams present major management challenges in many parts of the developing world. In India, CoLab partnered with MIT Tata Center for Technology and Design, MIT Material Systems Lab, and SWaCH Seva Sahakari Sanstha Maryadit, Pune wastepicking cooperative (http://swachcoop.com/about-swachpune.html) to hold a tri-sector (public, private, and NGO) conference in Pune, state of Maharashtra, to explore best practices.

In 2014:

- CoLab and MIT students held enterprise co-creation workshops in Kuna Yala, an indigenous region in Panama, where leaders have begun a zero-waste demonstration project at a small local hotel.
- In Nicaragua’s Autonomous South Atlantic Region (RAAS) CoLab offered entrepreneurship training workshops to about 200 wastepickers in El Rama, Bluefields and the Corn Islands.
- Wastepickers who participated in the workshops in El Rama, Bluefields and the Corn Islands successfully launched three businesses that joined a network of small recycling and waste collection enterprises participating in a yearlong CoLab-designed development curriculum. The curriculum will help waste entrepreneurs better integrate into the formal economy by formalizing their businesses—defining management structures; mapping the supply chain; opening bank accounts; and obtaining business loans.
- MIT students and El Rama wastepickers collaboratively designed new waste collection bikes to be used to expand door-to-door collection. Door-to-door collection yields cleaner waste and avoids the hazards of the dumpsite.
- MIT planning and engineering students are incorporating solutions generated during the Pune organic and sanitary waste management conference workshops into a comprehensive toolkit to help municipal governments and waste-picking cooperatives properly manage organic and sanitary waste. See a short film on the conference at http://indiawaste.wordpress.com/media/.

**PARTNER PERSPECTIVE**

GINETTE SOSA
Vice President
Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition
http://northwestbronx.org

The BCDI Economic Democracy (ED) training helped me to understand the connections between health and wealth. It was a different way to process the way we looked at and did organizing, the way we reacted to the issues in our community in the past. Before we’d see a problem, we’d outreach to the community, we’d look at the powers that be who have the authority to make the changes we want and then we would make a demand—ask for a solution. During the training, we began to understand not only what ED generally means, but what it could mean in our community and neighborhoods. Asset mapping also helped a lot. It caused us to step back and ask not only what do we need and want, but what is already here. The training made us think about how we are sustaining the solution so that we do not have to do the same thing over and over again.
CoLab and community partners generate new knowledge about “Sweet Spot” approaches.

We prepare new generations of planners to partner with communities to jointly develop cross-sector innovations to address systems failures.
Crises of violence and displacement have recently moved Colombia’s ecologically and culturally diverse Pacific region into the spotlight. Last summer, CoLab and Colombian partner, Manos Visibles, convened a group of 60 Afro-Colombian and Indigenous leaders to form the first cohort of the Pacific Power Community Innovation School. The School uses innovative leadership development and network building to strengthen economic development, civic engagement and multi-sector collaboration on the subnational scale. The participants work through a program of inquiry into instances of profound societal transformation around the world, using insights from that inquiry to develop their own ideas for peace-building and local economic democracy and development initiatives.

Although the Chilean economy is seen by many as a Latin American success story, it suffers from many economic contradictions and social inequality. In the southern Los Ríos region, an industrial monoculture and high unemployment lead many young adults to seek opportunities for self-employment to sustain themselves and their families. CoLab works with partners at the Universidad Austral de Chile to develop EmPréndete, an entrepreneurship education initiative focused on young parents and indigenous students. Through lesson-sharing and student peer collaboration, with our Universidad Austral partners we are creating assessment tools that measure and build on the program’s impacts in building a supportive ecosystem for entrepreneurship among youth, indigenous communities and women’s associations.

In a Spring 2014 workshop, students and faculty from Universidad Austral de Chile and MIT came together to explore ways to create a participatory assessment tool to evaluate the impacts of the EmPréndete development initiative on individual participants’ lives and in creating the conditions for successful self-employment strategies within the university system and the Los Ríos region.

CoLab, local universities and community partners in Puerto Rico completed a collaborative research project to identify tourism development opportunities in the island’s coffee-producing region. Part of an ongoing regional development effort to promote a sustainable future for the area, the research is helping local vendors strengthen their work in the hospitality sector, identifying areas for infrastructure investment and business development, and encouraging collaborative agreements among local and national stakeholders, including the Puerto Rico Tourism Agency.

**PARTNER PERSPECTIVE**

**PAULA MORENO**
Co-Founder and Director
Manos Visibles
http://www.manosvisibles.org

What challenges are you and CoLab working on together?
We are analyzing power structures and strategies to change power relations in economically excluded communities. We are not talking about a traditional vision of power, but rather a technical power, a multidisciplinary power, a power of coalitions, a power that is, to a large extent, idealist, a power that is consistent. Which non-conventional power structures could allow us to generate the changes that we need, and how can those structures help to change power relations and generate a more effective source of power in the region with the greatest challenges in terms of violence and vulnerability in Colombia?

Also, we are rethinking innovation. It’s not just about strategy, but concepts — what are we talking about when we talk about community? What are the elements of identity that today are redefining that community, in line with a series of global reflections that are occurring and that we already see happening in Colombia.

What are you learning?
From Manos Visibles, in this work with CoLab, we are learning to work in networks, to experiment and see what are the possibilities for collective work that we can generate from our different areas of leadership… and to think about the power of the ideas that we have that could allow us to generate a common agenda.

Our learning has been related to collective construction. It goes beyond my ideas or someone else’s ideas, but rather how the leaders we work with can engage in co-coaching to learn. This process of learning and reflection has allowed us to see how we can better connect with one another and generate joint initiatives; to reconfigure the assets that we have, in order to create.
CoLab creates spaces for high-impact stakeholders across multiple sectors to explore common interests and develop transformative projects.

MEL KING COMMUNITY FELLOWS: ARTISTS AND PLANNING

In 2014, the program worked with two highly-regarded artists to explore how the planning discipline could be animated with the creativity and criticality of artists’ perspectives, and in turn, how the artists’ might use the planning discipline to inform creative social justice projects. The artists, Mel Chin and Rick Lowe work in distinct manners, but their practices are socially engaged, and relevant to urban sustainability and community engagement.

1. Rick Lowe, Project Rowe Houses
2. Saket Soni, Executive Director, New Orleans Workers’ Center for Racial Justice
3. Fekkak Mamdouh, Co-Director, ROC-United
4. Denise G. Fairchild, Ph.D., President & CEO, Emerald Cities Collaborative
5. Pablo Alvarado, Executive Director, National Day Laborers Organizing Network
6. George Goehl, Executive Director, National People’s Action
7. Laphonza Butler, President, SEIU/ULTCW
8. Veronica Turner, Executive Vice President, 1199 SEIU
9. Gerald Hudson, International Vice President, SEIU
10. George Gresham, President, 1199SEIU
11. Monica Russo, Executive Vice President, 1199 SEIU
12. Mel Chin, Operation Paydirt/Funded Dollar Bill Project
13. Sarita Gupta, Executive Director, Jobs with Justice
14. Ai-Jen Poo, Executive Director, National Domestic Workers Alliance
15. Vilma Linares–Vaughn, Chief of Staff, SEIU Local 1199 Healthcare Workers East
16. Kent Wong, Director, Center for Labor Research and Education University of California, Los Angeles
17. Saru Jayaraman, Co-Founder and Co-Director, Restaurant Opportunities Centers (ROC) - United
18. Javier Morillo-Alicea, President, SEIU Local 26
19. Claudio Martinez, Executive Director, Hyde Square Task Force
20. Laine Romero Alston, Program Officer, Promoting the Next Generation Workforce Strategies Ford Foundation
**MELODY KING COMMUNITY FELLOWS: LABOR/COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS**

People of color remain at the bottom of the US economy, occupying jobs in the most insecure and unorganized sectors. In 2014, we continued work with labor and worker center leaders to examine this dynamic and develop innovative prototypes to address it through community-labor-worker partnerships. Prototypes include:

- Exploring ways to use Affordable Care Act requirements to promote community health planning efforts that can lead to wellness-based development approaches which leverage hospital procurement streams to build community wealth;
- Investigating partnerships with financial institutions that can help labor unions more actively use their collective assets to provide new benefits and build wealth for their members;
- Actively building bridges across undocumented immigrant and native-born black and brown youth movements to stop mass incarceration and mass deportation; and
- Convening a broad range of people of color base-building groups to compare approaches to activism and explore the role of money in politics.

**PARTNER PERSPECTIVE**

**SOFIA CAMPOS**

Board Chair - Boston/California, United We Dream, [http://unitedwedream.org](http://unitedwedream.org)
Organizer, The Freedom Side, [http://freedomside.org](http://freedomside.org)

What challenges are you and CoLab working on together?

_I have been working with the youth-led Freedom Side project and the Mel King Fellows. The Mel King Fellows space aims to connect unions and worker centers to better serve workers and families. Freedom Side is a youth of color led network of grassroots youth organizations and individuals working on immigrant, racial, and LGBTQ justice. The challenges are interesting and many. My role has included facilitating our understanding of mass criminalization and the deep links between mass incarceration and deportation, as well as bridging black and immigrant organizers, leaders, and communities. Building an intergenerational, intersectional movement for social justice is a great challenge, one which I feel very passionate and excited about._

What are you learning?

_I’ve learned that a lot of the challenges are major opportunities to learn from each other and step up in our leadership. This experience has given me a sense of abundance about the skills, backgrounds, and people committed to positive transformation of our society. I’ve also gained more confidence in my abilities to connect good people and ideas._

**SPURS FELLOWS’ LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND INCLUSION SEMINAR**

CoLab conducted a special seminar on methods and practices of collaborative innovation for the Special Program for Urban and Regional Studies [web.mit.edu/spurs/www/program](http://web.mit.edu/spurs/www/program). The Seminar resulted in a prototype of ‘SPURS After SPURS’, a program to strengthen the program’s alumni network.

**URBAN RESEARCH-BASED ACTION NETWORK (URBAN)**

CoLab is a founding member of URBAN ([http://urbanresearch-network.org](http://urbanresearch-network.org)) a nationwide network of community engaged researchers. As its roots in Los Angeles, New York City and Boston grow stronger, URBAN added a new node in Philadelphia focused on bringing scholars and community activists together to address challenges facing public education. Community-engaged researchers and scholars are developing new relationships through URBAN-sponsored sessions at annual convenings of the American Education Research Association and the American Sociology Association. In 2015, URBAN will host two national conferences to bring together community engaged scholars and researchers to explore collaborative research themes including advocacy, neutrality and equity oriented research; critical participatory policy research and organizing; ethical issues in, and institutional supports for, collaborative research.
CoLab fosters innovative ways to incorporate art and media into community development projects and urban planning.

COLAB RADIO

As we experiment with new media forms, our blog continues to be an important platform for sharing ideas and sparking discussions about social change in cities. Student guest editors provide some of our most popular content. Their work spans the urban planning discipline, from urban ecosystems to data accessibility to bridging communities across the African diaspora.

Community members—from urban planning practitioners and enthusiasts to artists and others—contribute great stories and series to CoLab Radio. In 2014, community bloggers’ topics ranged from navigating Nigeria’s informal transportation system to celebrating Toronto’s immigrant cultures. Community contributors to CoLab Radio also actively participate in our #citychat series, periodic hour-long twitter-based conversations on a variety of urban planning issues.
Over six weeks, eleven students worked in small groups to create multimedia portraits of residential buildings in Boston and Cambridge, delving into the design and use of the physical space, as well as the social history of the people who live, visit, or work in the buildings. The stories can be viewed here: http://colabradio.mit.edu/storytelling-for-planners-roundup-from-the-instructors/.

**IN THIS BUILDING: MULTIMEDIA AND PLACE-BASED STORYTELLING**

CO-LAB RADIO

The complex forces at the heart of community life – love, hate, friendship, greed, sacrifice – are difficult for social scientists and planners to comprehend. Arts and culture present a distinct realm of inquiry that illuminates these dynamics and creates empathy for realities not captured by social scientific explanation. Art and artists can help us all more intimately know cities, and offer powerful insights for understanding the realities of identity and place. CO-LAB launched a new program exploring these dynamics. In its inaugural year, Empathetic Aesthetics worked with two planning projects initiated by artists appointed as 2014 Mel King Community Fellows. Mel Chin’s Operation Paydirt explores how aesthetic inquiry can help inform efforts to stem lead poisoning among children. Rick Lowe’s Translation: Vickery Meadows seeks to strengthen community life in a Dallas-area neighborhood facing rapid demographic change from immigration.

**REFLECTIVE PRACTICE PLATFORM**

In CoLab’s fall class on storytelling and urban planning every participant created a story about life in a building in the Boston area. This photo of Rindge Towers was part of the story told by Ashwin Balakrishnan and Rachel Finkelstein. Read the story at http://colabradio.mit.edu/rindge-towers-a-fight-to-preserve-affordable-housing/.

This summer, CoLab completed the pilot of an online, interactive platform to facilitate urban planning students’ reflective practice and learning from field-based experiences. The online tutorial aims to:

- Prepare and support students as they begin their field-based graduate studies;
- Help students reflect on practical lessons learned while involved in field-based activities; and
- Give students an opportunity to document practical wisdom acquired after they’ve completed a field-based assignment.
CoLab engages students, faculty, alumni, scholars, community organizers, government officials and others around the world.

Based inside of MIT’s Department of Urban Studies and Planning, CoLab serves as a convening hub, helping to facilitate the exchange of innovative ideas, between the academy and communities.
CoLab builds partnerships and supports a robust network among community innovators in the US, Latin America, the Caribbean, Malaysia, and India.

Our projects are made possible by the generous support of foundations and partner organizations. We continue to diversify our funding sources and seek new ways to generate revenue.

Just Urban Economics:
Ford Foundation
New York Community Trust
Rockefeller Brothers Fund
Rockefeller Foundation

Waste Management:
Inter-American Development Bank
MIT D-Lab
MIT Tata Center

Core Support:
Ford Foundation
Kendeda Fund
MIT Provost

Empathetic Aesthetics:
Surdna Foundation

Leadership Development:
Conconcreto
MIT Office of the Dean of Graduate Education
W.K. Kellogg Foundation

Inclusive Regional Development:
Ford Foundation
Jon Borschow (1972)
MIT MISTI Chile

URBAN:
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