

Future of (How We) Work Task Force
Meeting #7: Innovation & Collaboration 10/13/20
Notes

While we continue to work remotely, how do we recreate the power of Kendall Square's proximity to accelerate innovation through collaboration and partnerships?

One of the primary reasons Kendall Square is such a powerhouse is because of the power of proximity. Water cooler conversations at coworking spaces, introductions at in-person networking events, and surprise interactions on sidewalks or in local restaurants have historically been facilitators of innovation and collaboration. Without these opportunities to engage with each other, the Kendall community needs new mechanisms to stay connected within their companies and with other companies.

At this Future of (How We) Work Task Force Meeting, we heard from leaders at four companies about how they are overcoming challenges and generating opportunities to inspire innovation and collaboration.

Challenges:

- Startups, who rely heavily on networking opportunities to grow their talent, investment, and collaborative pipelines, are being most impacted by the loss of in person opportunities to interact.
- In the case of coworking, which is grounded in the concept of shared space and amenities which facilitate exciting collisions, there is a new anxiety around the act of sharing. Meanwhile, without a sense of the community you are sharing with, people have shown to be less careful and considerate.
- Zoom fatigue demotivates people from participating in virtual networking, or participating in virtual events at all, knowing they can access recordings later on.
- Where once networking occurred organically, we now must be intentional around “scheduling” time for networking, in an atmosphere where we are all already overwhelmed and uncomfortable.
- Companies are now recruiting for remote positions, and time zone differences present an obstacle to virtual or socially distanced networking events.
- New, remote hires may not have a sense of the place or perspective that is Kendall Square, the most innovative square mile on the planet.
- Those who are aware of Kendall's magic may be disenchanting by lack of physical proximity and we may lose potential incoming talent.

Opportunities:

- While hiring remotely presents challenges, it also opens up Kendall to an entirely new talent pool and the diverse perspectives they have to offer.
- Where once we all presented our most professional selves, everyone has been forced into a position of vulnerability that has yielded a new sense of empathy and community, making company events feel even better than ever.
- The concept of a typical networking event - cocktails and conversation - is easily translated into a virtual context. Meanwhile, a whole host of concepts which would have been otherwise difficult in person can now be offered digitally, such as cooking classes. Companies are also more inclined to offer in person experiences which can be socially distanced, such as golfing and ski trips.
- People are lonely in quarantine, so those with the energy to do so are eager to connect in a socially distanced or virtual setting for casual company fun or external networking experiences.
- Virtual experiences may be more accessible for professionals in caregiving roles, who can now join from home where otherwise they could not in person.
- Where once large group networking events were standard, now 1:1 opportunities to connect are being facilitated in a variety of ways within companies.
- Socially distanced walking meetings provide a change of pace (pun intended).
- Kendall has the capacity to work together and build out the infrastructure for community beer gardens, community bonfires, and other outdoor experiences to bring employees and companies together and maintain our community while maintaining social distancing.