The Indiana Toll Road Corridor is home to seven major colleges and universities. These institutions include: Indiana University-Northwest, Purdue University-Calumet, Purdue North Central, Indiana University-South Bend, University of Notre Dame, Goshen College, and Trine University. Additionally, several other major institutions are in close proximity. Corridor economic development leadership has an opportunity to support targeted technology development and other partnerships with institutions of higher learning that have the potential to provide benefits to both parties.

The University of Notre Dame, for example, is an internationally recognized research institution with decided strengths in a number of areas including nanotechnology. As part of its nanotechnology research, the university has partnered with a number of other recognized institutions of higher learning. Innovation Park in South Bend is a technology park developed through a public/private partnership between the City of South Bend and the University of Notre Dame. This tech park provides a place for research and development of intellectual property intended to transform knowledge into commercialization.1 Other notable research efforts occur at Purdue University’s and Indiana University’s campuses in the Corridor. University-sponsored community engagement and technology research and development are present across the Corridor, but may not be as connected to their communities or regions as either party would prefer. This presents an area of opportunity to develop these relationships in the future.

Identifying opportunities for additional partnerships where both universities and communities benefit can be a difficult and time-consuming task. However, realizing these opportunities has the potential for significant, positive impacts on regions that can successfully achieve them. Such partnerships that are often recognized for their positive regional impacts include Silicon Valley, Boston’s Route 128, and North Carolina’s Research Triangle. University/community collaborations exist elsewhere across the U.S.2 A university needs a healthy community in order to attract top faculty and administrators. Communities can benefit from the creation of intellectual property in their backyards, and university research and engagement activities which are becoming more common throughout the U.S.

1 For more information, see http://or.nd.edu/technology-transfer/technology-transfer-faqs/#mission.
2 Among others, an enlightening perspective from universities’ points of view can be found at http://www.pew-partnership.org/pdf/new-directions/2_partnerships.pdf.